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ESSAYS IN  
BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

# Essays in Biblical Interpretation

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## THE TYPOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURES

ROBERT V. MOSS, JR.

**I**N A little-noticed statement entitled "Guiding Principles for the Interpretation of the Bible" drawn up by an Ecumenical Study Conference at Oxford in 1949 there is a section entitled "The necessary theological presuppositions of Biblical interpretation." The sixth of the seven presuppositions set forth reads as follows:

It is agreed that allegorical interpretations which were not intended by the Biblical authors are arbitrary and their use may be a disservice to the proper recognition of Biblical authority. But Christian exegesis has been justified in recognizing as divinely established a certain correspondence between some events and teachings of the Old and New Testament.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps here for the first time in the modern era of biblical studies we find a clear distinction between allegory and typology not only with regard to definition but also with regard to their relative validity in the interpretation of the Scriptures.

The principle is carefully enunciated. Note for example that the statement speaks of *Christian* exegesis. Further, the word "typology" is not used. Rather, the statement suggests that there is "a certain correspondence" between *some* events and teachings of the Old and New Testament. All that the writers seem to imply is that allegory and typology cannot be dismissed from hermeneu-

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<sup>1</sup> *Biblical Authority for Today*, ed. Alan Richardson and Wolfgang Schweitzer (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1951), p. 241.

tics in the same breath and that "correspondence" between some—not all—events and teachings in the Old and New Testaments must be reckoned with by any serious Christian interpreter.

We must remember that until a century ago typology and allegory were regarded as the normal means of interpreting the Bible. But this was overthrown by modern criticism. In the new movement it was the historical approach which mattered. Over against the traditional view which regarded the Bible as "a vast harmonious complex of prophecy and fulfillment, type and anti-type, allegorical picture and spiritual reality, fused together by the uniform inspiration of the Holy Spirit,"<sup>2</sup> the new biblical critics sought to discover the true and original meaning of the literal sense of the Bible.

The abandonment of allegory and typology was a necessary accompaniment of the recovery of the historical view. It could not have been otherwise and we should be grateful for it. But it led to certain disastrous consequences from which we are only beginning to recover. For one thing, historical study led to an extreme emphasis upon the diversity of biblical thought. It was only natural for literary critics and historians to seek out unique characteristics of the separate books of the Old and New Testaments. But this was done at the expense of losing virtually all sense of the unity of the Bible. This approach is clearly reflected in I. G. Mathew's *The Religious Pilgrimage of Israel*.<sup>3</sup> Here each period in the history of Israel is regarded as having its own "religion"—e.g. "The Religion of the Semi-Nomads," "The Religion of the Sinai Confederates," "The Religion of Nationalism," "The Religion of the Reactionaries," etc. Where this view is accepted the invariable response to the question "What does the Old Testament say about God, or the chosen people, or man?" is this: "Which writer do you mean?" And a second consequence was simply the loss of the relevance of the Old Testament. It was regarded as really belonging to the student of the history of religions. At best it was looked upon as "preparation" for the New Testament. But what relevance has preparation to the life of the Chris-

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<sup>2</sup> G. W. H. Lampe and K. J. Woollcombe, *Essays on Typology* (Naperville: Allenson, 1957), S.B.T. No. 22, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> New York: Harper and Brothers, 1947.

tian and the church if the whole truth is to be found only in the pages of the New Testament?

We must acknowledge at the outset therefore that the renewed interest in typology is closely related to the problem of the unity of the Scriptures. There is no desire on the part of those who are engaged in the current discussion to revert to the older kind of allegorical and typological interpretation without the historical approach. The question being raised today is this: Now that we are able to approach the Scriptures from a critical and historical point of view, is it possible that typological interpretation rigidly defined and carefully used can aid us in understanding the total biblical witness? There are of course certain related questions: To what extent is it used within the Bible itself? Are there ways of distinguishing between helpful and misleading typology? Can typological interpretation be used in the life of the church today?

## I. TYPOLOGY AND ALLEGORY

It will be helpful in approaching the problem if we first of all distinguish between typology and allegory and then attempt a definition of typology in the light of its distinctive use in the Bible. One of the unfortunate aspects of the current discussion is the unwillingness of some scholars to distinguish between allegory and typology. Both are tarred with the same brush, so to speak, and are dismissed summarily. James Smart, in his recent book on *The Interpretation of Scripture*,<sup>4</sup> appears to believe that typology and allegory in the history of interpretation have been so closely identified that they cannot be distinguished satisfactorily. He argues that the word "typology" should be given up. A. G. Hebert subsumes both allegory and typology under what he calls "mystical interpretation."<sup>5</sup> Briefly let us attempt to mark out the differences between the two approaches to scripture and then go on to deal with biblical typology.

Basically there is a similarity between allegory and typology. In both it is assumed that there is a correspondence between the

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<sup>4</sup> Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961, p. 97.

<sup>5</sup> *The Throne of David* (London: Faber and Faber, 1941) pp. 33-38.

event or figure in the text and something else which is not immediately present. In the case of typology the correspondence is with a past or future event or figure. In the case of allegory, the correspondence is generally with a truth, an idea conceived or a moral teaching.

Here the similarities cease. In allegory, the interpreter is not concerned with the literal or historical meaning of the text. He is free to roam at will over the vast range of biblical symbols and teachings and to link them with the text only in the most tenuous way. In fact, an event, person or thing is never what it seems to be but rather represents something else. Thus, as in Origen's interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan, the man on the road to Jericho is not just a traveler, he is Adam. The thieves who strip him are the devil and his minions. Or in the traditional interpretations of the Song of Solomon we find that it is not the love between a man and a woman which is celebrated. Rather it is the love between Israel and Yahweh, or Christ and the Church.

The Apostolic Fathers faced with the problem of making the whole Old Testament relevant to the life of the Christian resort to allegory. They find moral implications in the lists of clean and unclean beasts in the Pentateuch. They can find edification in such matters as the parting of the hoof and the chewing of the cud. In times of theological controversy the Fathers through the use of allegory could defend orthodoxy from almost any passage in the Old or New Testaments. Lampe<sup>6</sup> refers to a sermon in the *spuria* of Chrysostom on the Massacre of the Innocents. Here it is held that since only the children of two years old and under were murdered while those of three presumably escaped, the Scripture means to teach us that those who hold the Trinitarian faith will be saved whereas Binitarians and Unitarians will undoubtedly perish.

A modern French Catholic writer, the Abbé Tardif de Moidrey, gives a devotional exposition of the book of Ruth according to the "moral" sense: "Elimelich (that is to say, my God and my King) going abroad to Moab, represents . . . the preacher of the

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<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 31.



Gospel going out from Bethlehem, the House of Bread or the Church, moved by hunger, that is, love of souls; his spouse, Naomi, represents the Law of God, and Ruth's coming to Bethlehem represents her entrance on the Religious life."<sup>7</sup>

For the allegorist, the important thing is not the text or what the text is saying. Rather, it is a truth which exists outside the text and to which the text is made to bear witness. He does not begin with the word which is in the text. Rather, he begins with a doctrine or a moral teaching which he seeks to relate to the passage before him. Augustine was among those who recognized the dangers of this kind of interpretation, and yet he engaged in it and enjoyed it. He saw no harm so long as the truth read into a passage by allegory belonged somewhere in the general sense of the Scriptures.

It will be seen that the allegorical method is really indifferent to history. And in this sense it is contrary to the biblical faith which has as its object the God who acts in history. Furthermore, one may legitimately ask why the Bible is at all necessary for this kind of interpretation. If it is granted that the allegorist must operate within the framework of the general meaning of Scripture (derived, we may suppose by some other method than allegory), he might as well turn to some other ancient or modern book and discover the truth hidden there. Actually, allegory is much more suitable to Hellenistic ways of thinking than to Hebraic. There is behind it the Platonic doctrine of ideas, i.e., that the soul before its coming into the realm of the bodily or corporeal has beheld the ideas—that which is immutable and alone truly exists—and so is able to remember them once more on viewing their images. We should not be surprised therefore that within the Scriptures allegory is rarely used at all.

What is typology? K. J. Woollcombe has given a succinct definition:

Typology, considered as a method of exegesis, may be defined as the establishment of historical connexions between certain events, persons or things in the Old Testament and

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<sup>7</sup> Cited by Hebert, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

similar events, persons or things in the New Testament. Considered as a method of writing, it may be defined as the description of an event, person or thing in the New Testament in terms borrowed from the description of its prototypal counterpart in the Old Testament.<sup>8</sup>

There are several things which must be noted about this definition. First of all it is somewhat restricted. If we accept this general way of understanding typology, it can be said that typology is used by the writers of the Old Testament as well as the New. Hosea declares that Israel under God's judgment shall once again go through the wilderness. It is not that there will be correspondence in outward historical details, but rather that Israel's situation is such that there will be a recapitulation in some form of God's saving acts of election and redemption. Deutero-Isaiah sees a correspondence between God's mighty acts in creation and in the exodus, on the one hand, and between the deliverance in the exodus and the expected future deliverance of the exiles from Babylonia. Jeremiah also turns to the exodus for an image to describe the eschatological relationship between Yahweh and his people: "Behold the days are coming . . . when I will make a new covenant with the house of Judah" (31:31).

A second thing to be observed about this definition of biblical typology is its emphasis upon the historical. Here we come to that which is unique in biblical typology. Whereas in Hellenistic and Oriental thinking, correspondence—whether allegorical or typological—is always seen between the heavenly and the earthly, in biblical typology the correspondence is eschatological—between beginning and end. In Romans, Paul describes Adam as "a type of the one who was to come." Almost invariably it can be said that in biblical typology, the correspondence is horizontal in the sense that biblical history is conceived in a linear way. By contrast, in Hellenistic interpretation the correspondence is vertical. The biblical person, event or thing may be regarded as *tupos tou mellontos* whereas for the Hellenistic interpreter, e.g., Philo, the

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<sup>8</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 39f.

person, event or thing is regarded as *tupos tou alethinou*—pattern or image of the truth existing in the heavenly realm.

## II. TYPOLOGY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

We have already suggested that typology is used in the Old Testament. Let us go on briefly to consider its use in the New Testament before considering the legitimacy and limitations of typology particularly with regard to the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament.

At the outset we must recognize that the Old Testament was not taken over into the church simply because the first Christians were Jews, but because the promises and the fulfillment could not be separated. In other words, the Old Testament provided the images, the language, the thought-forms by which Jesus Christ was to be understood. There could be no other way. The Old Testament, to use a modern phrase, was their apperceptive mass. Whatever terms we use to speak of the unity of the Bible—Act II has no meaning without Act I; the answer cannot be understood without the question; the fulfillment without the promise—it was inescapable that the early Christians should use the Old Testament in their attempts to understand and interpret the meaning of Christ.

Further, one does not get the impression from the New Testament evidence that the earliest Christians turned frantically to the Scriptures in order to defend themselves. At first, at least, their motive was not apologetic. Rather, they read the Scriptures with recognition. It is not difficult to imagine the awe with which the disciples read Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 in the days following Jesus' death. They read these passages in a way not conceivable before the crucifixion and resurrection. Further, it is possible that within a very short time the church had made a collection of Old Testament passages which seemed to illuminate the meaning of Christ. Drawn almost wholly from the Prophets and the Psalms, these passages dealt with such themes as the Day of the Lord, the possibility of a new Israel, and the Suffering Servant. We shall be facing the question of the relationship between typology on the one hand and promise and fulfillment on the other. But at this point we

shall confine ourselves to the consideration of specific examples of typology in the New Testament.

One of the problems here is that while allegory is closely attached to the text under consideration—that is, the words of the text must be repeated—typology allows for considerable freedom. And the correspondence may not be explicitly noted—in fact, is most often not so noted. Since this is the case, there is a temptation for those who use this approach to look at a passage wholly from the point of view of typology and apart from historical interpretation. It is important to state that rightly conceived typological interpretation is not to be regarded as over against or separated from historical interpretation but rather as an extension of it.

We have already referred to the Adam-Christ typology of Paul (Romans 5 and I Corinthians 15). For example, Paul writes to the Corinthians, "As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." Here Paul contrasts Adam with Christ. He is showing that the incarnation is a new creation and that the redemption which comes in Christ has undone the fall which came in Adam. In order to make his point he introduces the concept of the second Adam who in the historical events of his life and death recapitulated the pattern of the first creation.

In this connection it is instructive to note that Philo, when he speaks of the heavenly man, points to a pre-existent idea chronologically prior to the earthly Adam. In Philo the Heavenly Man belongs to another realm of being and cannot come to terms with time, space and sense. Thus Philo's typology is a vertical typology and Adam is *tupos tou alethinou* rather than *tupos tou mellontos* as in Paul.

We find a further example in I Corinthians 10. Here in an effort to warn the church at Corinth against idolatry, immorality, and desecration of the eucharist, Paul notes the correspondence between the children of Israel in the exodus and the situation of the church in his day. The Israelites were under the cloud (i.e., God was present with them). They had the sacraments: they were baptized (in the Red Sea); God gave them spiritual food (the manna, the water from the Rock). Yet 23,000 of them fell in a single day. Fortunately, Paul does not attempt to spell out the correspondences. He says merely that "these things are warnings

for us" (vs. 6). This does not imply that the historical event of the exodus was unimportant or is to be seen wholly in this light, i.e., as a warning for us. James Smart calls this a "parable." But a parable would call for a different set of images and would not narrate an historical event. It is a warning simply because it reveals the way in which God acts toward his chosen people. In this sense, it is a typological interpretation of an Old Testament passage. And we cannot fully grasp what Paul means by it or what his readers understood by this passage unless we are willing to grant that both Paul and they saw and accepted this correspondence.

The Author of Hebrews also uses typology, and more explicitly than any other New Testament writer. It is applied to Melchizedek (however unconvincingly) in chapter 7, the Covenant in chapter 8, the Day of Atonement in chapter 9, and Mt. Sinai in chapter 12. Despite the fact that there is much in common between Philo and Hebrews, the "Ideal" Atonement in Hebrews does not belong to the world of Ideas but took place in history when Jesus died on the cross. Or consider the Mt. Sinai typology. The country which Philo sought was a realm apart. But not for the readers of Hebrews:

For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers entreat that no further messages be spoken to them. But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the first-born . . . and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant.

Heb. 12:18ff, RSV.

The city to which Christians have come is the heavenly city which has come to earth in Jesus Christ.

The question may now be raised whether Jesus himself used typology in his interpretation of the Old Testament. This is a difficult question. We can say without hesitation that the Evangelists and the tradition interpreted his life and ministry typologically. For example, in the Lucan account of the Transfiguration

we learn that Jesus is talking with Moses and Elijah about the *exodos* which he will "fulfill" (*pleroun*) in Jerusalem. The English translators have had great difficulty with this verse. Generally it comes out "departure" that he is to "fulfill" or "accomplish" in Jerusalem. It is probable, for reasons which we cannot go into here, that Luke is suggesting that the death of Jesus in Jerusalem will bring to fulfillment that which was promised in the *exodos* to the children of Israel. The Christ event is seen as a new *exodos*. One can sympathize with the translators. Or take the Marcan account of Jesus' baptism (Mark 1:9-11). It is not just the pious imagination of an interpreter that recognizes the event as cast in terms of the creation story. The waters, the Spirit brooding as a bird, the voice from heaven—all of these images cluster to suggest that the narrator sees in the baptism of Jesus the beginning of the new creation. Elsewhere in the Gospels, Jesus appears as the New Moses, the Twelve as the nucleus of the New Israel, the Gospel as the New Law.

But the question remains. Did Jesus himself use Scripture in this way? It is a fact that in the records we have Jesus rarely quotes Scripture. He rather takes up the mind and spirit of the Old Testament in his teachings, while dealing with the Scriptures in a sovereign and unprecedented way. For this reason it is rather difficult to demonstrate that he did. Certainly one example would be the cup-word at the Last Supper: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (I. Cor. 11:25). Here Jesus is interpreting the meaning of his death to his disciples. The event in the history of Israel which sheds light on the significance of his death is the making of the covenant at the foot of Mt. Sinai in the time of Moses. Just as Yahweh had entered into a special relationship with his people through the shedding of blood at the time of Moses, so now the shedding of his blood will constitute the new covenant. This is a typological use of the Old Testament. The great danger is that the interpreter will press the details of the correspondence between the two events. Jesus does not do this in the tradition which has come to us.

We shall not try to give a final answer to the question about Jesus' use of the Old Testament. Ultimately it is bound up with the problem of Jesus' "self-conscious" or "messianic conscious-

ness." The indications are, however, that it was he who began to read the Old Testament in this typological sense.

### III. TYPOLOGY IN THE CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

It is remarkable that while allegory is widely used by the rabbis of ancient Judaism to interpret the Old Testament it is rarely used by the writers of the New Testament. Conversely, the New Testament writers freely used typology while it is rarely found in the rabbis. Typology would appear to be almost a distinctively Christian approach to the Old Testament. And it may be fair to say that this was always more important for the church than allegory. It was typological interpretation which revealed the *greater* correspondences between the Old Testament and the New. When it became necessary to show that the whole Old Testament was relevant to Christian faith and life, allegory was the resource which the early exegetes used.

But what about the typological interpretation of the Old Testament today? We have noted that the prophets, for example, think typologically. Basically the question we are raising is this: What does the Old Testament have to do with the Christian believer? As Gerhard von Rad puts it:

What part have I in the Old Testament as a Christian believer, and what part has the church, if it cannot be that I identify myself, at least partly (it was never a question of more than that!), with the religion of ancient Israel? . . . But I belong to none of the twelve tribes, I do not offer sacrifice in Jerusalem, nor do I hope in terms of Isaiah 2:1-4 for the glorification of the Temple mountain. . . . God's gracious provisions, so lavishly on Israel, seem to pass me by, because I do not belong to the historical people Israel.<sup>9</sup>

It is significant that the scholars who are facing this question for the most part are Old Testament men. They are dissatisfied with

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<sup>9</sup> "Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament," *Interpretation*, XV, 1961, p. 189.

any view which regards the Old Testament merely as preparation for Christ or as the history of faith fully explicated in the New. The great problem in the traditional Christological interpretation of the Old is that it does not do justice to the concrete history of the Old Testament. There we see the word of God entering into all of the ambiguities of the world and of history. The Christ by whom the Old Testament is interpreted in the traditional view becomes little more than an abstraction floating above the history of the people. The rich variety of the Old Testament witness is lost.

Brevard Childs has approached the problem through a study of the meaning of fulfillment in the Old and New Testaments.<sup>10</sup> He shows that a word which is filled in the Old Testament is one that is true. A word which is empty is a lie. When God speaks a word by his mouth, he fills it by his hand. The word spoken by God maintains itself by reaching the wholeness of God's purpose for it.

Childs concludes that it is a mistake to regard fulfillment in terms of "identical correspondence" between two entities. This tendency is rooted in the Greek theory of truth which looks for exactness in correspondence. In contrast, Hebraic thought would not regard the two entities as independent or wholly separate from one another.

In this light Childs suggests that we should not see

Jesus Christ as the culminating ingredient in a filling process. . . . The New Testament makes it clear that he did not complete in this sense, but that he himself brought fullness where before there had been emptiness and fragmentation. Something completely new came with him. Yet in the light of this totality it is now possible in retrospect to see those moments (*kairoi*) in the Old Testament which belong to his reality and strive to reach it. Conversely, it is possible from his fullness to recognize that much of Israel's religion finds no completion in him.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> "Prophecy and Fulfillment: a Study of Contemporary Hermeneutics," *Interpretation XII*, 1958, pp. 259-271.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269.



Childs goes on to show that because certain Old Testament events share in Christ's reality, from the New Testament perspective they are often viewed as part of the actual work of Jesus Christ.

It would appear therefore that while typology is admissible in the Christian interpretation of the Old Testament, this form of interpretation must not in any way obscure the richness and diversity of Israel's history. This is the real danger of the view proposed by John Marsh, who suggests<sup>12</sup> that the biblical message can be summarized in the following way: in both the Old Testament and the New, the same God offers the same salvation through the same Saviour by the same acts. If one rests content with the pattern which is proposed, the biblical message becomes little more than a set of propositions. If the pattern is to be helpful at all, then we must immediately move on to show the changing ways in which the "same salvation" was conceived—promised land, long life, rest, etc. If the same Saviour is to be seen at work in both Testaments, the "many and various ways" of his action must be delineated.

It may be asked whether this kind of typological interpretation of an Old Testament passage does not go beyond the way in which the author understood the text. I think that we must answer quite honestly that it does. We have the same situation within the Old Testament itself. Certainly it is clear that the theological significance of an historical event is not always fully recognized by those who share in the encounter with God. As the prophets and other writers look back upon certain events in the historical life of Israel, they are often so taken by the redemptive significance of those events that they frequently portray something that transcends what actually occurred. For example, we are led to believe from the narratives that all of the people crossed into the promised land *en bloc* under Joshua. Historical research reveals that such is not the case. The biblical writers sing of Palestine as if it were a veritable garden of Eden with rushing rivers and fertile fields, whereas in reality it is for the most part a grubby, hilly country.

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<sup>12</sup> "History and Interpretation," in *Biblical Authority for Today*, ed. Alan Richardson and Wolfgang Schweitzer (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1951), pp. 181-197.

But here we must note that in the view of the prophets every fulfillment gives rise to a promise of greater things. Every redemptive event is a sign of a still greater event. David's throne, for example, points to the coming of the reign of the Anointed One. If, therefore, this process of interpretation takes place within the Old Testament, is it not equally valid within the framework of the whole of redemption history? For example, the Suffering Servant of Deutero-Isaiah, whether interpreted individualistically or collectively, arose out of and was rooted in the historical situation of the exile. The prophet was speaking to his contemporaries in Babylon and no doubt they were able to identify the Servant. The New Testament, however, sees in the Suffering Servant a manifestation of the reality known in Jesus and therefore identifies the two. Thus the fragmentary events of the Old Testament are interpreted in the light of their fullness in Christ and given their true dimension. Is it too much to suggest that had it not been for Jesus, Judaism itself might not have been able to see the image of the Servant in some of its dimensions or indeed have been drawn into the passages at all? Von Rad recognizes this as a valid approach to the understanding of the Old Testament when he says:

Typological interpretation will thus in a fundamental way leave the historical self-understanding of the Old Testament texts in question behind, and go beyond it. It sees in the Old Testament facts something in preparation, something sketching itself out, of which the Old Testament witness is not itself aware, because it lies quite beyond its purview.<sup>13</sup>

#### IV. TYPOLOGY IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH TODAY

There can be no question but that the typological interpretation of the Scriptures, particularly in the patristic and Reformation periods, was edifying and persuasive. This is especially apparent in early Christian art. We find in fourth and fifth century graffiti and sculptured sarcophagi, for example, the way in which the Roman Christians answered the question, "Who Is Peter?" The

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<sup>13</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 190.

characteristic figure is bearded, holding a rod which rests on a rock from which water gushes forth. At the spring are the figures of Roman soldiers drinking. It is a temptation to identify the figure as Moses. But in early Christian art, Moses never has a beard. Rather, the figure is a typological representation of Peter as the anti-type of Moses. Apparently the Romans saw Peter as the new Moses leading Christ's people in the wilderness. And of course he is the rock apostle. But more important, he is the apostle who brought the waters of baptism to Rome. Could they have given any more adequate answer to the question, Who is Peter? in graphic form.

But when we turn to our own day, we must confess that to a large extent typology fails to communicate. At its best, of course, typological interpretation does not set out to prove something in an apologetic sense. Its purpose is merely to clarify, illuminate—or even more, to suggest. In the case of the Bible, unless the basic images are known in the context of *Heilsgeschichte* they will carry little meaning. We see then that it is not just the myths of the Old and New Testaments which are a stumbling block, it is also a lack of acquaintance with the story of Israel and the church. We need not only what Austin Farrer calls “a Rebirth of Images.” We also need a deeper and fuller understanding of the history of redemption.

Yet this is not sufficient if Scripture is to come alive through typological interpretation. It is not enough for me to see the correspondence between an event in the Old Testament and another in the New, as if there were only two foci. There are in reality three. It is only when our experience corresponds in some broad way with the experience of Israel and the early church that the Scriptures really come alive.

Merrimon Cunninggim has recently said that it is apparent from all the evidence that the churches with the finest church school curricula are the Negro Protestant Churches in the South. Why does he say this? It is clear from the actions of Negro youths in the last seven years that a high proportion of them have attained an unusual degree of Christian maturity. In Atlanta several years ago when the police tried to interfere with demonstrations being staged by the Ku Klux Klan it was the Negro young people en-

gaged in the sit-ins who defended the right of the Klansmen to demonstrate. Not only this but these young people also called a prayer meeting to offer intercessions for the enlightenment of the Klan—at 6:00 a.m. on a Sunday morning in a public stadium. More than 5,000 Negro young people appeared at 6:00 a.m. on that cold and rainy morning to pray for those who despitely used them.

I cite this because I believe that for these young people the Scriptures are still alive. They have chosen to bear suffering rather than to inflict it. And they believe firmly that what they are engaged in can best be understood in biblical symbols. Louis Lomax in a recent issue of *Harper's Magazine* gives the following excerpt from a sermon preached in a Southern Negro church:

"And this is the way the new freedom came about," the preacher began, his singsong voice rattling the rafters. "We marched on Washington. . . ." "Amen," the congregation shouted back. "Like Moses we made our way down to the waters, singing 'let my folks go.'" "Yes, praise the Lord." "Only we didn't walk to the Red Sea, we marched down to the Potomac. . . ." "Amen, preach the word." "But, praise God, instead of Moses and Joshua, we had Thurgood Marshall, Roy Wilkins, and A. Philip Randolph . . . ain't that right?" "Hallelujah, amen." "And we begin to sing and pray and clap our hands and do the holy dance." "Yes, Lord," Sister Minnie screamed, leaping to her feet to dance for joy. "And our voices got louder," the preacher continued, his voice now sounding like a March wind blowing through dry shingles. "We was heading toward Zion. . . . Just about the crack of dawn, the Lord pulled back the sky. He told the rising sun, the sinking moon, the fading stars, and the floating clouds to get out of his way so he could see. And the Lord poked his head down through the elements. . . ." "Well, do Jesus," Sister Louise intoned, leaping to her feet. "And the Lord said, 'What you colored people doing making all that noise so early in the morning?' and we told him, 'Lord, we want to be free. No more back seats; no more schools we pay for and can't go to.' And the Lord smiled and said, 'Look

behind you!' And we looked, like Moses searching for a rod to part the waters. But instead of a rod we saw a building. A high building with tall columns . . . and with a picture of blind justice holding a pair of unprejudiced scales. And the Lord said, 'You colored people go in that building. There's a man in there named Earl Warren, he's a servant of mine. Tell him your troubles and cut out all that noise so I can go back to sleep.' "<sup>14</sup>

Is typology outmoded? It is for those who cannot become involved in the life of the people of God, or who do not see the divine human encounter as taking place in the concrete events of every day life and world history. But those who share in the sufferings of Christ and who are aware of his holy judgment and redemptive benefits will utter a fervent Amen to these words from the Epistle to Hebrews:

And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect (11:39f).

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<sup>14</sup> "The Negro's New Comedy Act," June 1961, pp. 42f.

## THE NAME OF GOD AND HIS SOVEREIGNTY

ELIZABETH R. ACHTEMEIER

THERE IS A certain amount of theological confusion in the field of Old Testament studies today regarding the revelation of the name of Yahweh in the Old Testament. This confusion centers around the question as to how the divine name is to be understood in relation to the understanding of the concept of name throughout the ancient Near East.

So far as I am aware, all scholars agree that a name in the ancient Near East was far more than a title to distinguish one person from the other.<sup>1</sup> Name was the bearer of person. The name of a man contained within it the essence of the man, his power, his reputation, his honor, his inmost being. As a man was named, so he was (1 Sam. 25:25), and a change in character or an entrance into a new phase of life necessitated a change in name (Gen. 32:28; 17:5,15). To exist one had to have a name (Eccl. 6:10), and to have one's name cut off was to be obliterated (1 Sam. 24:21; 2 Sam. 14:7; Num. 27:4; Jer. 11:19, etc.). A man's father and his father's father lived on in his name. As Johannes Pedersen has put it, "In the name lies the whole substance of the man's soul; if it is killed, then there is only absolute emptiness."<sup>2</sup>

To know a man in the ancient Near East, therefore, one first had to know his name, and if one knew it, one then might use the man's name and exercise influence upon him, not because one knew the linguistic significance of his name, but because the man's soul was wholly in his name.<sup>3</sup> And this was equally as true with

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<sup>1</sup> For the most comprehensive discussions, see O. Grether, *Name u. Wort Gottes im AT*, 1934; J. Pedersen, *Israel*, I-II, 1926, pp. 245ff; H. Bietenhard, *Theol. Woerterbuch zum NT*, V, 1954, pp. 251ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 255. Thus the law of the Levirate marriage in Israel protected the deceased against absolute death by preserving his name, Deut. 25:5-6; Ruth 4:25.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 252.

respect to the gods. The gods' power and being were contained in the gods' names, and if one could call a god by name, one could enlist that god's power and being in one's own cause. To call on the name of a god meant to summon that god to be present, and to know his name meant that one could always find him again.<sup>4</sup> Thus, Jacob (Gen. 32:29) and Manoah (Judg. 13:17) both sought after the name of their divine visitor in order to insure that they might summon him to their cause in the future, while in some branches of theology in Egypt, the real name of Amon was kept secret in order that man would be unable to gain power over the deity.<sup>5</sup>

The problem which concerns us, however, is this: Do all of these statements hold true with regard to the revelation of the name of Yahweh? Is Yahweh's name the bearer of his "whole soul," the bearer of his essence? Is his name to be understood in the same manner as every other divine and human name in the ancient Near East?

By far the greater number of theologians and commentators in the field of Old Testament study would answer these questions in the affirmative, although a goodly number of them qualify their answers to some extent. But some make no qualification at all. In discussing the revelation of the name of Yahweh to Moses in Exodus 3:13-15, G. A. F. Knight writes:

Moses has the temerity to ask God for his name, for the exact and total description of his very essence—and God gives him it. We can therefore draw no other conclusion but that in giving his name God put himself in total humility into Moses' hands, that in a sense which is certainly no exaggeration of language, God "emptied himself" before his sinful creature.<sup>6</sup>

Murray Newman shares substantially the same views:

For the ancient Hebrews the name of a person was closely associated with his nature. The name was an expression of

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<sup>4</sup> G. van der Leeuw, *Phaenomenology der Religion*, p. 135.

<sup>5</sup> G. von Rad, *O. T. Theology*, I, 1962, p. 185n.

<sup>6</sup> *A Christian Theology of the O.T.*, 1959, p. 44.

his inmost being. The same was true of God. His name stood for his reality. When Yahweh announced his name, therefore, he was believed to be revealing his inmost nature to his people; he was giving himself to them in a unique and intimate way.<sup>7</sup>

Von Rad and Eichrodt both carefully qualify their statements on the subject. Nevertheless, they apply the ancient Near Eastern understanding of name to an understanding of the name of Yahweh. In discussing Exodus 3, von Rad writes, “. . . the name Jahweh, in which, one might almost say, Jahweh had given himself away, was committed in trust to Israel alone.”<sup>8</sup> And W. Eichrodt specifically sets the revelation of the name of Yahweh into an ancient Near Eastern context:

. . . by revealing his Name God has, as it were, made himself over to them; he has opened to them a part of his very being and given them a means of access to himself.

The close relationship apparent here between the Name and the nature of God can only be understood from a knowledge of primitive beliefs about names. For primitive man the name is not merely a means of denoting a person, but is bound up in the closest possible way with that person's very existence, so that it can become in fact a kind of alter ego. Hence knowledge of the name is more than an external means of distinguishing one person from another; it is relation with that person's being. When, therefore, the priests pronounce a blessing over Israel in the Name of Yahweh, it is more than the expression of a wish that they may be blessed. By “laying the name of Yahweh on the people” they are in fact setting in motion an actual beneficent power.<sup>9</sup>

Other theologians do not speak of Yahweh “giving himself” to his people, but a number of them clearly accept the view that in Yahweh's name is revealed his essential nature. For H. Schultz, the Old Testament “divine names are definite revelations to men

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<sup>7</sup> *The People of the Covenant*, 1962, pp. 33-34.

<sup>8</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 182.

<sup>9</sup> *Theology of the O.T.*, I, 1961, p. 207.



of God's essence, public names."<sup>10</sup> R. Abba writes that Yahweh's name "as expressing essential nature . . . implies the most complete divine self-disclosure. . . ."<sup>11</sup> Martin Buber agrees that the "true" name of a person or a god "is the essence of the person (or god), distilled from his real being, so that he is present in it once again."<sup>12</sup> J. C. Rylaarsdam states, "In the Bible a name, whether of man, angel, or deity, sets forth the character of its bearer."<sup>13</sup> In other words, all of these writers accept the view that the ancient Near Eastern understanding of a name is to be applied also to an understanding of the revelation of the name of Yahweh.

If this be true, then there follow some serious theological consequences. If Yahweh does deliver himself over into the hands of Israel, if in his name he reveals his essence and places his power at the disposal of his chosen people, then Yahweh of Israel has made himself subject to the artistry of all those magicians and practitioners of religious conjury with which the ancient Near East abounded. He has revealed himself to be a God who can be summoned at the will of man, who can be enlisted in the cause of Israel, no matter what that cause may be. To know Yahweh's name would be, as R. de Vaux has recently implied, "to be able to hurt him" or "to be able to do him good."<sup>14</sup> More seriously, to know Yahweh's name and therefore his "whole soul" would mean that Israel could "magnify Yahweh's name" (2 Sam. 7:26) in the sense of actually making Yahweh's soul greater, while Israel's forgetfulness of Yahweh's name (Jer. 23:27) could lead to Yahweh's actual extinction! Such can only be the implications of Pedersen's discussion, in *Israel* I-II, of the power and greatness of the soul as contained in the name, p. 249, and of the remembrance of a name, p. 257. Pedersen maintains that to remember a name—including the name of Yahweh—is to keep it alive and active. Thus he writes:

One makes a name alive by mentioning it. The name immediately calls forth the soul it designates; therefore there is such

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<sup>10</sup> *O.T. Theology*, II, 1895, p. 125.

<sup>11</sup> *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, III, 1962, p. 502a.

<sup>12</sup> *Moses*, 1946, p. 51.

<sup>13</sup> "Exegesis of the Book of Exodus," *Interpreter's Bible*, I, 1952, p. 874.

<sup>14</sup> *Ancient Israel*, 1962, p. 43.

a deep significance in the very mention of a name. Yahweh wants to be mentioned and remembered; it is chiefly done in the holy places (Exod. 20,24), and ought not to be done in the wrong place and season. Where misfortune abides, one must not mention his name (Am. 6,10); his soul is violated by being made present at misfortune. One must not mention his name in connection with that which lacks the reality of life (Exod. 20,7; Deut. 5,11). But, above all, one must not forget it (Jer. 23,27). It is a different matter with the other gods. Their names must not be mentioned or remembered (Exod. 23,13; Deut. 18,20; Josh. 23,7; Hos. 2,19), for in that manner one contributes towards keeping them alive and their soul upright.<sup>15</sup>

Such is the final consequence of applying the ancient Near East's understanding of the name to the name of Yahweh: Israel becomes responsible for keeping Yahweh alive, and Yahweh is a God dependent for his very existence on Israel's memory!

Pedersen does not qualify these implications of his position, but other commentators have recognized the theological difficulties involved, and, while placing the revelation of Yahweh's name in its ancient Near Eastern context, have hedged their commentaries on Exodus 3 with qualifications designed to preserve Yahweh's freedom and sovereignty over the disposal of his person. Thus von Rad maintains that the second half of the enigmatic phrase in Exodus 3:14, *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh*, which von Rad translates as an imperfect *qal* form, "I will be (with you) what I will be," is a qualification of Yahweh's promise to be present with Israel. ". . . Jahweh reserves his freedom to himself, a freedom which will be displayed precisely in his being there, in his efficacious presence."<sup>16</sup> In this interpretation of v. 14, Buber concurs, maintaining that Yahweh "refuses to restrict himself to definite forms of manifestation." For Buber, Yahweh's promise to be present makes Israel's conjuring of him unnecessary, while Yahweh's refusal to restrict himself makes such conjury impossible.<sup>17</sup> But if

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<sup>15</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 256-257.

<sup>16</sup> *Op. cit.*

<sup>17</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 52-53.

'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh is to be understood as an *idem per idem* construction, as Abba,<sup>18</sup> Jacob,<sup>19</sup> and Freedman<sup>20</sup> all maintain that it is, then the second half of the phrase expresses not indetermina- tion but intensity, and the whole should be read, "I will indeed be with you" (cf. Exod. 33:19; Ezek. 12:25).

Von Rad further maintains that Yahweh's name, this "double of his being," was protected from improper use by the regulations of Israel's cult and by the third commandment, which may originally have been directed against the use of the name in magic, but which in the main was designed to prohibit false swearing in the name of Yahweh.<sup>21</sup> This cultic protection of the name reached its height, then, in Deuteronomy, with the dwelling of the name limited to one place of worship (Deut. 12:5,11,21; 14:24, etc.). Similarly, Eichrodt points out that the third commandment threatens dire punishment for any misuse of the name, "thus educating men in a truly personal relationship with their God" and that "consequently we look in vain for any instance of the magical use of the divine name in the Old Testament."<sup>22</sup> But both von Rad and Eichrodt themselves point out that there was never in Israel, as there was in Egypt, any attempt to keep the divine name secret,<sup>23</sup> and indeed that it never became a "mystery" for Israel, but rather that Israel felt duty bound to make Yahweh's name known to the Gentiles.<sup>24</sup> These facts do not square with the view that Yahweh's name was the bearer of his essential power and being, and there is a theological hiatus between the understanding of a name in the ancient Near East and the understanding of Yahweh's name in the Old Testament.

So clear is this hiatus that at least two Old Testament scholars reject the view that Yahweh's name revealed anything of his essential being. L. Koehler writes:

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<sup>18</sup> *JBL*, LXXX, IV, Dec. '61, p. 326.

<sup>19</sup> *Theology of the O.T.*, 1958, p. 51.

<sup>20</sup> *JBL*, LXXIX, II, June '60, p. 153.

<sup>21</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 184.

<sup>22</sup> *Op. cit.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Von Rad cites Is. 12:4 and Ps. 105:1-3 in support of this point. *Op. cit.*

The Old Testament knows Jahweh only as a name, which in itself says absolutely nothing about God, and from which no conclusions can ever be drawn about the nature of God, simply because the name as a mere name affords no information whatsoever.<sup>25</sup>

W. Harrelson, in dealing with the third commandment, maintains that the ancient Near Eastern understanding of names was not applicable to the name of Yahweh:

The ancient Near Eastern peoples considered the names of persons and things to be expressive of their nature or character. . . . Once one knew the name of a person or thing, one had entered into relationship with and had certain control over this person or object. In the case of Yahweh, however, this was not true. The name of Israel's God, Yahweh, is nowhere fully explained in the Old Testament. (Exod. 3:14 is best considered as the denial of an etymological explanation). Yahweh discloses his nature in his historical deeds.<sup>26</sup>

Pursuing a different solution to the problem, Th. C. Vriezen maintains that Yahweh does not reveal his name to Moses at all. Rather, Yahweh promises, "I will be there," making his presence with Israel certain and the knowledge of his name therefore unnecessary. Thus, the name Yahweh is *sui generis* in Israel, according to Vriezen, and by this name God is described in his relation to man. He is never described in his being in itself.<sup>27</sup>

The evidence of the Old Testament seems to me to support the view that Yahweh's name is to be understood in a manner different from the understanding of every other name in the ancient Near East, *i.e.* the fact that Yahweh's name is indeed *sui generis*.

There can be no doubt that in the Old Testament Yahweh's name is understood as an instrument of his person and activity. In the early passage of Exodus 23:20-21, Yahweh accompanies his people in the wilderness in the form of his name, laid in his angel, and the angel therefore has the divine authority to forgive

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<sup>25</sup> *O.T. Theology*, 1953, p. 43.

<sup>26</sup> "Ten Commandments," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, IV, p. 571.

<sup>27</sup> *Theologie des ATs in Grundzuegen*, 1956, pp. 201-202.

sin. In the later view of Isaiah 30:27-28, the name of the Lord is the instrument of Yahweh's anger to sift the nations with the sieve of destruction. In both of these passages, Yahweh's name is a temporary manifestation of Yahweh's activity on earth. But in Deuteronomy, Yahweh's name takes up permanent residence at that place where Yahweh has chosen to lay his name (Deut. 12:5,11; 14:23-24; 16:6, etc.), a place later identified by the Deuteronomic historians with Jerusalem (1 K. 11:36; 2 K. 21:4, etc.). Thus, though Yahweh himself dwells in heaven (Deut. 4:36; 1 K. 8:27ff), the dwelling of his name on earth guarantees that he will be always available to the prayers and petitions of his people. And in the post-exilic passages, Yahweh's name becomes an alternate term for Yahweh himself (Ps. 54:1,6; 89:24). Indeed, throughout the Old Testament, Yahweh's name is understood as an instrument of his power. In the name of Yahweh, the youthful David defeats the Philistine giant (1 Sam. 17:45), just as in the same name later Israel treads down her assailants (Ps. 44:5; cf. 118:10-12). Yahweh's name is the source of Israel's constant help (Ps. 124:8), and therefore it is in his name that Israel is to bless (Deut. 10:8; 2 Sam. 6:18; Ps. 129:8) and curse (2 K. 2:24) and swear (Deut. 6:13; 1 Sam. 20:42; Jer. 12:16).

But there is never any thought in the Old Testament that Yahweh's name is the bearer of his person in such a way that Israel can control him by the knowledge and use of his name. His presence with Israel through the medium of his name remains always a free gift, a fact which the Old Testament goes to some lengths to point out. Numbers 6:22-27 carefully notes that the Levitical blessing upon the people is made effective only by the free action of Yahweh, just as the early oracles of Balaam show man's inability to bless or curse apart from the action of Yahweh (Num. 23:8,20; cf. Ps. 129:8; Judg. 17:2; Josh. 6:26). Not one of the uses of the phrase "to call on the name of Yahweh" can be understood as a magical coercion of the Lord, but rather in the Old Testament has the meaning simply of the cultic worship of Yahweh (Gen. 4:26; 12:8; 13:4; 26:25; Zeph. 3:9). And the God of the third commandment, far from being in the power of man, is the Lord who will punish the person who so attempts to conceive him (Exod. 20:7; Deut. 5:11).

In fact, it is this unique God-ness of God, this sovereignty of his person above man's ability to control him, towards which the Old Testament understanding of the divine name points. In every passage dealing with the profanation of Yahweh's name in the Old Testament, there is no thought that Yahweh has been made servant to man, but rather that Yahweh's holiness has been assaulted, that is, that man has tried to make him less than God, less than absolute sovereign of absolute might (Lev. 20:3; 22:2; 22:31-33; Ezek. 36:20-21; Am. 2:7cd). By devoting their children by fire to Molech (Lev. 18:21), by swearing falsely in Yahweh's name (Lev. 19:12), by trimming their hair or cutting their flesh (Lev. 19:27-28), men have tried to coerce Yahweh, or they have treated him like some baal, like some nature god unworthy of sole and pure devotion (cf. Mal. 1:11-12). Yahweh's name has been profaned because his holiness has been profaned, because men have tried to make him something less than God. And to hallow Yahweh's name is to keep his commandments, that is, to act as if he is the sole Lord over life and conduct (Lev. 22:31-33).

It is for this reason that any form of magic is forbidden within Israel (Exod. 22:18; Deut. 18:10-11; Lev. 20:6,27). It is not that magic has any effect upon Yahweh: the third commandment is not shielding Yahweh from possible manipulation or harm! Rather, magic is forbidden because it does not recognize God as God, because it tries to control the Lord who cannot be controlled. And so in the prophets, Yahweh will deliver his people out of the hands of the magicians, and "then they will know that he is Yahweh," that he is the one who cannot be subjected to the will of man (Ezek. 13:17-23).

In similar fashion, the false prophet is condemned to die (Deut. 18:20), and prophecy in the name of Yahweh has absolutely no effect, unless Yahweh in his sovereign freedom makes the prophetic word come to pass (Deut. 18:20). The use of the name of Yahweh by the prophet guarantees nothing, and Yahweh will bring judgment upon those who by false prophecy try to make him less than God (Jer. 14:14; 23:25; 27:9-10; 29:9). Connected with the use of Yahweh's name in the Old Testament is the inseparable thought of Yahweh's holiness, and far from being an

expression of Yahweh's submission to the will of man, the divine name carries with it an expression of Yahweh's absolute Godhead, Yahweh's sovereign disposal over his own manifestation and power.

The emphasis in the Covenant Code (Exod. 20:24) and in Deuteronomy on the necessity to worship only at those cult sites where Yahweh has caused his name to be remembered or at the one place where Yahweh has caused his name to dwell is entirely consistent with the above views. By limiting his own self-manifestation to specific places, Yahweh sets himself apart from any indefinable "ground of being" and all naturalistic and mystical attempts to enter at any time or any place into his sovereign presence. Rather man must repent, *i.e.* turn around, and seek him at the place which he chooses, and he is present there for man only because he has promised in his freedom so to be present. But equally, Yahweh's choice of a place in which to lay his name adds to the Old Testament witness to him as personal and individual, and thus his Godhead is distinguished from any rationalistic abstraction in which God becomes some sort of universal Being or Principle of unity, devoid of ethical will and its accompanying demands.<sup>28</sup> Yahweh's name, on every count, is connected with the

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<sup>28</sup> So, too, Eichrodt, *op. cit.*, p. 206. It is no accident, then, in the New Testament, when God fully manifests his lordship through his Son, that the divine name is bestowed upon Jesus (Phil 2:9) and that men are required to seek God solely through this name (Acts 4:12; Jn. 14:12-14; cf. 15:16; 16:23-24; Rom. 10:13; Mk. 9:37). Where two or three are gathered together *in his name*, there he is in the midst of them (Mtt. 18:20; cf. Mal. 3:16-4:3). (This saying is paralleled in the Mishnah, *Aboth* 3:3: "Two that sit together and are occupied in the words of the Law have the Shechinah among them"). Thus, everything that the Christian does is to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus (Col. 3:17). Christians are to receive forgiveness and the washing away of their sin in his name (Lk. 24:47; Acts 2:38; 10:43,48; 22:16, etc.). The sick are to be anointed and healed in his name (Jas. 5:14). Those of the church are sanctified and justified in his name (1 Cor. 6:11), and those who believe in his name are given the power to become children of God (Jn. 1:12). The New Testament demand to seek God only through Jesus Christ (Jn. 14:6), who "manifests" the name of the Father (Jn. 17:6) witnesses once more to the sovereignty of God expressed in his name. Thus, in the eschatological time, all nations will acknowledge Yahweh's name as one (Zech. 14:9) and confess that in it alone are salvation and strength (Is. 45:23), a thought expressed in the New Testament then by the universal worship of the name of Jesus, when "at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10).

thought of his unique sovereignty, a sovereignty which ill accords with the general understanding of name and divinity in the rest of the ancient Near East.

If Yahweh's name were the bearer of his essence, then it seems doubtful that we would have in the Old Testament at least three interpretations of its meaning (Exod. 3:14; 34:6-7; 34:14). A name so all-important in its content would have not allowed for such freedom of exegesis. But all of the three interpretations of Yahweh's name do have one thing in common, and it is this common factor which points to the real Old Testament understanding of name: all three are exegeses of Israel's experience with her God in her history, for to know God's name in Israel meant to confess a sacred history (cf. Is. 25:1; Ps. 7:17; 9:1-2,10; 18:49-50; 22:22; 34:3ff; 66:1-7; 72:18-19, etc.). That is, it was in historical event that Israel learned that "Yahweh" meant *hesed* and *'emeth*, the interpretation of the name in Exod. 34:6, just as it was in historical event that Israel came to know that "Yahweh" also meant God's burning *qin-ah* for his purpose (Exod. 34:14). Through centuries of activity, Yahweh defined his nature for his people, and his name became synonymous with the whole *heilsgeschichtliche* content of that long activity. To say "Yahweh" in Israel was to say nothing less than the God who had covenanted with and guided Abraham and Isaac and Jacob (and indeed, Moses' own father, Exod. 3:6!<sup>29</sup>). Or to say "Yahweh" was to say Israel's God from the land of Egypt and only Savior (Hos. 13:4; Exod. 20:2, etc.). The name "Yahweh" had no meaning or content in Israel apart from the *Heilsgeschichte*, and it never could have, for the person of its bearer was he who could not be encompassed by anything in heaven or on earth or under the earth (Exod. 20:4; 1 K. 8:27), much less defined in his essence by a name. Yahweh alone could define himself, through his own sovereign redemptive activity. So it is that in Second Isaiah his name receives its final content, when Yahweh works his final, eschatological act of redemption through Israel, the Suffering Servant, for all of the earth (Is. 41:4; 48:12; 49:6,26).<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Buber is the only one I know to have pointed this out, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Davidson, *The Theology of the O.T.*, 1904, p. 47: "It is not an ontological name, but a redemptive one."



In Exodus 3:13-15, then, just as in the theologically similar passage of Exodus 33:18-23, we do not have the revelation of Yahweh's essence in his name to Moses. In both passages, Moses does request a revelation of Yahweh's full being (cf. Exod. 33:13). When Moses asks, "What is his name?" (Exod. 3:13), he is asking, "What kind of a God is this?" "How is he in his person that I may *know* him?" (See Exod. 33:13 for the verb).<sup>31</sup> "What is the full content of his glory, his manifestation of his being on earth" (Exod. 33:18)? But in both Exodus 3 (from E?) and Exodus 33 (from J?), this request of Moses' is turned aside, and instead only a promise is given: "I will indeed be with you" (Exod. 3:14),<sup>32</sup> or "I will indeed be gracious to you" (Exod. 33:19). Moreover, both promises are set in contexts in which the presence of Yahweh with Israel is emphasized (Exod. 3:12; 4:12, 15; cf. Josh. 1:5; Exod. 33:14,16; 34:9), and both promises are accompanied by the revelation or proclamation of Yahweh's name (Exod. 3:15; 33:19; cf. 34:5-6). But both are also understood as substitutes for the revelation of Yahweh's being.

It does not seem too radical to suggest that in Exodus 3:13ff and Exodus 33:17ff we have deliberate attempts on the part of the Old Testament writers to set forth that new understanding of the divine name which came into being in the ancient Near East with Yahweh's revelation of his name to Israel. Whether this new understanding dates back to the time of Moses or not we cannot say. Buber maintains that *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh* is "... derived ... from a tradition which, in the last resort, cannot go back to

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<sup>31</sup> So similarly Abba, JBL, LXXX, IV, Dec. '61, p. 323; Buber, *op. cit.*, p. 48; Jacob, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

<sup>32</sup> Reading *'ehyeh* as a first person imperfect *qal* form of the verb *hayah*, which has the sense of relation or present, efficacious being. The attempt of W. F. Albright and those who follow him, such as Freedman, to understand the Tetragrammaton in the sense of "He who causes to be" or "the Creator" seems inadequately founded. There is no other known instance of the verb *hawah* or *hayah* in the *hiphil* mood. Further, the creation-faith in the Old Testament is almost totally derived from reflection upon the events of the *Heilsgeschichte* and is intended to be a confession of faith concerning God's omnipotent power and sole goodness, cf. Gen. 1:31. See Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, 1946, p. 198f.; D. N. Freedman, "The Name of the God of Moses," JBL, LXXIX, II, June '60, pp. 151ff.; H. Schultz, *op. cit.*, p. 136, predates Albright's view. See also B. D. Napier, "On Creation-Faith in the Old Testament," *Interpretation*, Jan. '62, pp. 21ff.

anybody other than the founder."<sup>33</sup> But it is certain that the interpretation of the divine name in Exodus 3:14 was not intended to convey Yahweh's essence or character to Israel, and that Israel recognized this! There is only one clear attempt in the Old Testament ever again to reflect this interpretation of the name in Exodus 3:14, an attempt found in Hosea 1:9,<sup>34</sup> and such interpretation never became and was never intended to become a normative interpretation of Yahweh's name.<sup>35</sup> That is, Israel herself realized that Yahweh had not revealed his being in his name, but rather that his character was made known to her only in historical events. Unlike the name of every other god of the ancient Near East, the knowledge of Yahweh's name did not place him at the disposal of his worshippers. Yahweh's presence with his people could not be summoned but only promised: "I will indeed be with you";<sup>36</sup> "I will indeed be gracious to you."

It was on this basis that Israel saw Yahweh's name as the source of her salvation, as the power making effective oaths and blessings and bringing to pass a curse. "Yahweh" was the name of the one who had promised to be with her. His name was therefore synonymous with his real effective presence. Thus there is found in Ezekiel the constant phrase, "you shall know that I am Yahweh," in connection with Yahweh's real presence both in judgment (Ezek. 6:13; 7:27; 11:10; 12:16) and in salvation (Ezek. 34:30; 37:13-14; cf. Joel 2:26). Upon Yahweh's name Israel could call, and he would answer her, not because Israel could summon Yahweh by use of his name, but only because the one named Yahweh had promised that he would indeed be with his people. If Exodus 3:13ff does not go back to Moses, it nevertheless mirrors the central, unique affirmation of the covenant faith of Israel, that Yahweh had entered into a relationship with his people, which distinguished them from every other people on the face of the

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<sup>33</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 55.

<sup>34</sup> Perhaps Is. 52:6 is also an echo of Exod. 3:14.

<sup>35</sup> So, too, von Rad, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

<sup>36</sup> There is also probably in the imperfect *qal* form of *'ehyeh* in Exod. 3:14 contained the sense of Yahweh's continuity, i.e. Yahweh's faithfulness over-against the fickleness of Israel, a sense reflected in Mal. 3:6, which reads, "I am Yahweh; I change not." So, too, Abba, JBL, Dec. '61, p. 327; Jacob, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-52; Davidson, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

earth (Exod. 33:16; Is. 45:14; cf. Num. 23:9).<sup>37</sup> Unlike every other people of the ancient Near East, Israel walked only by faith in a promise. For unlike every other god of the ancient Near East, Yahweh her God was the sovereign Lord of history who could bring that promise to pass.

Who has performed and done this,  
calling the generations from the beginning?  
I, Yahweh, the first,  
and with the last; I am He. (Is. 41:4)

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<sup>37</sup> Thus in Exod. 17:15, Yahweh is the rallying point for the hosts of Israel.

## HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

PAUL J. ACHTEMEIER

THE RELATIONSHIP between historic event and Christian faith is much on the minds of contemporary Biblical theologians, and the discussion of this problem bids fair to become more widespread in the future. It is with this area that the following three studies also deal. They represent an attempt to come to terms with the kind of thinking about time, about event and faith and history, that underlies portions of the Biblical witness. The studies are not "programmatically," *i.e.* they do not announce a bold new scheme or "fresh approach" to solve the problem, but they do reflect one conviction, namely, that the Biblical witness takes seriously—very seriously—the dependence of the Christian confession on historic event. The three studies that follow both give the basis for, and reflect the application of, that conviction.

### I. HISTORY AND REVELATION

It is virtually a truism to say that the God of the Old and New Testaments is a God who acts, rather than a God who contemplates. The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is a God who involves himself in the affairs of the world and men. He is not lost in the contemplation of his own divine perfection, as was the god of Aristotle. From this, the Biblical witness draws the conclusion that God is not so much concerned with eternal truth as such, so much as he is concerned with the redemption and judgment of his fallen creation. God is at work to set right what sin has distorted—that is a fair capsule-summary of the Biblical witness.

## I

Yet this almost universally-acknowledged truism has implications which, so it would seem to me at least, have largely been over-looked by both Biblical scholars and theologians alike. The primary implication for our study is this: if God is at work to set things back in order, if his purpose is redemptive, then his acts must be seen in this light, *i.e.* as fulfilling his purpose, rather than imparting information. That means that God's acts in history do not have as their primary aim the impartation of information about God, or about man. The purpose of God's acts within history is not to tell us something about God, to give us additional information about what he is like, nor (*pace* Bultmann) is the purpose to help us achieve authentic self-awareness or existential self-understanding. Rather, God acts in history in order to turn the stream of that history in the direction he desires, and point it toward the goal he has determined. When God acts, he acts in accordance with his redemptive purpose for man, which purpose God is working out in history. Therefore, the primary purpose of the acts of God in history is not to impart, or "reveal," information. We may put it quite bluntly: God does not act in order to reveal something. He acts in order to do something.

This emphasis is not drawn simply for the sake of introducing something new, nor for any "shock-value" it may have. Unless the nature of God's acts in history is understood in this way, then the Biblical witness to the historical events upon which it is founded will be misunderstood, and problems will be raised which are not only misleading, based as they are on false premises, but which will also distort the point of the Biblical witness when they are answered. We may illustrate the point on the basis of an article concerning our problem—the relationship of history to the Biblical witness—which appeared some years past in the *Canadian Journal of Theology*.<sup>1</sup> The problem is this: if the significance of God's acts is the revelation of information or knowledge, *i.e.* if these acts have an exclusively cognitive value, then some rather fundamental problems arise with respect to the claim that the

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<sup>1</sup> S. B. Frost, "History and the Bible" *loc. cit.* vol. 3, no. 2, April, 1957.

Christian faith is an historical religion, i.e. based on historical fact. If the significance of God's acts is purely, or primarily, the information imparted, then the most pressing question is this: did it happen just the way it is reported, or does the report misrepresent the act, and thus give us false information? S. B. Frost has put the problem this way: "Abraham, for example, is clearly to be recognized as one of the many Aramean sheikhs who drifted around the fertile crescent in the wake of their more powerful Amorite relatives; but were his journeyings truly a sacred quest, or were they given that character by the legend-making tendencies of later generations?" In other words, is the information we derive from the report of the wanderings of Abraham accurate or not? This is a fundamental question, if God's acts are meant to provide information, and God called Abraham to undertake his wanderings. Have we got the right information from this event? If not, then can it really be God's act for us, if his act is done for the purpose of conveying information, and the information we have conveyed to us is false? If the primary function of revelation is cognitive, then it becomes enormously important at what point in the records of the event certain information is introduced. If it is late, perhaps the information is false; perhaps the result of "the legend-making tendencies of later generations."

Faced with this kind of question, we have two alternatives. Either we rely on our own historical acumen to determine what is the accurate information about the event through analysis of sources, knowledge of similar cultures and of the tendencies of certain types of literature, etc., or we must call upon the supernatural intervention of the Holy Spirit to preserve the accuracy of the information against all possible historical and literary vicissitudes.<sup>2</sup> Neither alternative is the kind that inspires confidence in its own inherent validity, yet this is just the kind of difficulty into which we are plunged when we hold that the reason God acts is to pass on information about himself or about us. The question centers around this fact: if we get false information from such an

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<sup>2</sup> When theological and Biblical scholarship faced these alternatives around the turn of the century, the "modernists" represented the first alternative, the "fundamentalists" (or "orthodox") the second.

event, then to that extent either God's act is not God's act *for us* (we missed the point), or else the purpose of God's act is lost, and God's word returns to him, as it were, void. It did not fulfill its purpose, if its purpose was to pass on information, and the information became garbled.

But those are in fact not the only alternatives, simply because they do not deal with the point of God's acts in history. The acts are not to give information; they are to set history along on the path God wants it to take. If, then, God acts in history for the purpose of moving that history toward his desired goal, then whether or not we may happen to understand the significance of the event, either at the time it happens or at some later time, the fact will not be altered that the event has moved history in the direction God wanted it to move. Abraham therefore becomes the father of the chosen people, the Jewish nation, and therefore does embark on a divine quest in following his more powerful Amorite relatives, whether he happened to realize it at the time or not, or whether anyone realized it at the time or not. To put it another way, God's act through Abraham is not dependent for its effectiveness on Abraham's ability to recognize the hand of God moving history in the direction he desires. Therefore, Abraham, whether he was consciously setting out to institute *Heilsgeschichte* or not (and I doubt that he was!), was nevertheless the instrument by which God did set forward his plan for history, his *Heilsgeschichte*.

There is a further difficulty inherent in the attempt to understand God's acts as primarily revelatory in the sense of revealing, or imparting, information. If this is the case, then history itself is of no significance; it is only some *interpretation* of the event that gives it meaning, that can make history a "medium of revelation." S. B. Frost has again stated this problem quite well (p. 94): "Clearly," he writes, "a bare incident in history has nothing to *tell us about God* . . . But this *revelation of God's character* lies not in the bare abstract fact, but in our interpretation of it . . . In other words, history can be the medium of revelation just because it is *event plus interpretation*, and it is the interpretation rather than the event which can allow history to function in this way" (italics mine). Unless, therefore, we get the right interpretation, any act of God in history loses all significance, since "a bare event" in

history cannot be significant, if the purpose of the event is exclusively, or even primarily, to pass on information. But if all that is true, then Christianity has difficulty in affirming that it is a religion based on historic event. Rather, if Prof. Frost is right, we must say that the Christian faith, based on God's acts, is really based, not on historic event, but on one interpretation of that event, or series of events. And then the question immediately arises: but is it the only, or even the right, interpretation? Again, if men misunderstand, then Christ died in vain, at least for those who do not accept the Christian interpretation of the event. That is, Christ's death is effective only if one accepts the interpretation that it is effective. And then a man is, in the end, saved not by what God has done, but by what the man knows.

If, on the other hand, God acts in history to set history off on a new course, if those acts are meant not to give information, but to change history by inserting something new into it, then we can affirm that the Christian faith is based on historic event, whether those events be understood at the time or not, whether they be understood by all men or not. God's act, in other words, designed to change history, is effective when history is changed, whether men know it was God's act that changed it or not. Historical existence, for example, is changed if the Son of God rose from the dead—a new reality has been inserted into history and death is no longer supreme—and that whether men happen to think or believe it could happen or not. Historical reality has been altered by the emergence of the Christian Church, and it has affected men who live in that history whether they happen to believe the Church is the result of God's act or not.

But this, in turn, raises another question: if God's acts do change history, how does it happen that not all men recognize this fact? If God's acts do set history going in a new direction, how does it happen that some understand those acts one way, others another? The answer to this question centers around what has been rather aptly named the "scandal of particularity," *i.e.* that God's purpose is set forth in some events in history, and not in others. Therefore, the meaning and goal of history is not derived from the sum total of all historical events, but from those events which set history moving in accordance with God's purpose. And because God's



purpose is not man's purpose, and is therefore hidden, for that reason those acts which do and those which do not set forth that purpose are not objectively or rationally discernible. To put it briefly: the acts which set forth God's purpose are distinguishable only to the eye of faith. It is at this point that we must affirm the cognitive value of God's acts—that is, we must affirm that because such acts are God's acts, they do tell us something of his purpose, and therefore of himself, but they do it derivatively, not primarily.

Before we pursue that line of thought, however, a word must be said about the Biblical concept of time which allows us to say that some acts reveal God's purposes, and others do not. Such a thing is possible if time is understood in qualitative terms. That is, if some times (or events in time) can have a different quality than other times (or events), and if as a result not all times (or events) are to be seen on the same level, then it is possible that the true nature of history (events in time) will be discernible in some times (events) and not in others. If history is not a single line cut into chunks of various size, but a series of events, some of which are qualitatively different from others (in that God is working in those particular events to achieve his purposes), then the meaning of history (or the nature of time) can only be understood in these particular events. If, on the other hand, time must be understood solely in quantitative terms, if it is a homogeneous continuum, any part of which is essentially no different from any other, then its meaning can only be seen from looking at the sum total of all time.<sup>3</sup>

## II

It is at this point that the Hebrew mentality differentiated itself most strikingly from the Greek. For the Greek mind, time was understood in quantitative terms, which means that the meaning of time, and therefore of history, can only be found by abstracting that meaning (or "truth") from the sum total of all time. Since for the Greek mind truth cannot be subject to change, and since

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<sup>3</sup> The Western mind shares the quantitative understanding, and applies it automatically: "how *much* time do I have left?"—time is a quantity! A qualitative approach is therefore quite foreign, and often confusing.

history is the realm of change, one can find the meaning (or truth) of history only by lifting himself out of the area of change (history) into the realm of the changeless (eternity). Therefore, the truth that time signifies can only be found by escaping time into the realm of eternity, an escape possible only through the use of rational categories, *i.e.* by abstracting the general (unchanging) principle from specific (changing) events.<sup>4</sup> Therefore it makes little difference at what particular time, or on the basis of what particular event, one attempts to understand time, since one may start at any given point to transcend time, in order to find its meaning in terms of eternal, which then means timeless, truth. Ultimate reality, therefore, can only be rationally comprehended, *i.e.* in terms of changeless, and therefore timeless, categories. Only what can be abstracted from the flux of time can be true, and therefore truth is, ultimately, incompatible with historic event. Historic event may illustrate, but it can never constitute, truth.

For the Hebrew mentality, on the other hand, all times are not the same, since in some points of time (events), God is acting decisively to set history forward toward its goal, and in other points of time he is not. Therefore, a view of the totality of time is of no significance: God works in particular events, not in the sum total of all events, and therefore the truth of history can be seen only in those events where it is being moved, by God, toward its goal. This means, however, that there are some events (times) which move history toward its goal, and other events (times) which do not, *i.e.* there is a qualitative difference in events, and therefore in segments of time. Those events by means of which God moves history toward its ultimate goal are saving events, since God's purpose is redemptive. Those events which do not move history toward this goal are not saving events. Thus, all events are not of equal significance, and all times therefore do not share the same nature. Time is not a quantum, which can be divided as a man sees fit. Times differ in quality of event (God's

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<sup>4</sup> The other possibility of escaping the realm of the changing to the changeless is mystical ecstasy, wherein the individual (change) is merged with the undifferentiated (changeless). Greek culture displayed both alternatives.

act or man's act), and therefore one time can be qualitatively different from another time.

This understanding of the differentiation between kinds of time also throws light on the New Testament view of eternity. Eternity is understood in terms of a quality, rather than a quantity, or absence of it. Since time is measured in terms of content (does God here set forward his purpose?), those times which are filled, in content, by God's acts, share the quality of eternity, *i.e.* God's immutable purpose to redeem his creation (*cf.* Heb. 13:8, Rev. 13:8). Since, then, time is understood in terms of quality, eternity can invade time without either being destroyed. When eternity does invade time, *i.e.* when God acts to set forward his eternal purpose, eternity imparts a new quality to time. If, then, eternity can describe the immutable resolve of God to fulfill his purpose by directing history to the goal he desires, then those points of human time, those events in history where that purpose is set forward, where history is set in motion toward that goal, are invaded by eternity, and thus have a quality about them that other points in time or events in history do not have. These events are qualitatively different, because in them, God is moving history toward his desired goal.<sup>5</sup>

It is only when time is understood in this Biblical sense, it seems to me, that we can understand what it means to say that Christ is the center of time, or the most significant event in history. Christ as the center of history is not to be understood in any quantitative sense. Christ is the center of time, not because he stands at the beginning of some significant train of events (quantitative view!), but because in this event, the redemptive purpose of God has most decisively invaded human history. History in this event is turned decisively in the direction God wants it to go. In this event, the

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<sup>5</sup> Lessing's famous dictum—that accidental historical truths can never become proofs for necessary truths of reason—is quite obviously tied to a quantitative view of history. If time is understood best in quantitative terms, Lessing is right: one cannot get a valid abstraction on the basis of partial evidence. But if time is understood qualitatively, Lessing must be reversed: *only* "accidental" (*i.e.* particular) historical events can give a knowledge of "necessary truth" (*i.e.* God's truth for men). The same holds true of those attempts to discredit the "absolute validity" of the Christian witness on the basis of the totality of history (*e.g.* Toynbee). Such a criticism has validity only from the perspective of a quantitative view of time.

goal toward which all of history is moving—a new creation, encapsulated in the term “resurrection” (cf. Rom. 8:23; I Cor. 15:51ff; 15:26; Phil. 3:21)—has been achieved in history, in the “Christ-event.” Therefore, in the Christ-event, the goal of history has become reality within history. For this reason, Christ is the center of history, not in terms of a quantity of time, but in view of the special quality of this Christ-event. In this event, God’s purpose invades human time, and therefore his ultimate purpose for human time becomes visible, historical reality. For that reason, this event is far more important than any “lessons of history” derived from the total movement of history. For the New Testament, history is not some “great endocrine gland that secretes its own meaning.”<sup>6</sup> History is the arena in which God works to fulfill his purposes of redemption, purposes which give to some events a quality different from that of other events.

The fact that Christ is the center of history is the point of the many statements in the New Testament that Christ is the fulfillment of Israel. Paul, for example, can say that all the promises of God, made to Israel and through them to all mankind, find their “yes” in Christ (II Cor. 1:20), and Peter can proclaim that what God promised through the prophets, he has fulfilled in Christ (Acts 3:18). For this same reason, the author of I Peter can use terms to describe the Church which are used in the Old Testament to describe the unique status of Israel as God’s chosen people (I Pt. 2:9f). In this passage, it becomes quite clear that because the Church is the body of which Christ is the head, those who are in this body are the New Israel, since they belong to the body of the one who has fulfilled what Israel was to be. For the same reason the Gospels picture Jesus in terms of the Suffering Servant, who in II Isaiah is the one who is to fulfill the mission of Israel. In short, what Israel was to be and do, Christ has become and has done, and for that reason what is said of Israel in the Old Testament, what is predicted concerning it and what is promised to it,

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<sup>6</sup> I owe this phrase to Théo Preiss, *Life in Christ*, trans. H. Knight, ch. 4, “The Vision of History in the NT.” (Naperville, A. R. Allenson, 1957.) On this general topic, cf. also T. Boman, *Hebrew Thought compared to Greek*, trans. J. L. Moreau, Phila.: Westminster Press, 1960, and John Marsh, *The Fulness of Time*, London: Nisbet, 1952, among others.

becomes reality in the New Testament (*cf. e.g.* Acts 2:16; Mt. 2:18, 13:14f, 35, etc.). For this reason, the New Testament can apply quotations from the Old Testament to Christ which were not predictions, but which described events already done. When the author of the Gospel of Matthew says Jesus' return from Egypt (2:15) was in accordance with the word "out of Egypt I have called my son," first spoken by Hosea (11:1) in reference to the historic event of the exodus, he is not simply bending history a little to prove a point. Because the author of Matthew sees that Christ is the fulfillment of Israel, he is able to see that nothing that happened to Israel can be unrelated to Christ. Christ, further, for the New Testament, bears not only the promises, but also the judgments of the people of Israel. Not only do all of God's promises find their "yes" in him, but also all of man's sin is nailed to the tree with him (*cf.* Gal. 3:13, Rom. 8:3ff). Christ is the fulfillment of the redemptive history begun with Israel, and is therefore of decisive significance for the sum total of human history.

Christ is more than simply the fulfiller of Israel, however, the Omega, as it were. He is also the presupposition of that Israel and its historical journey. Christ is the Alpha as well. That Christ is not only the fulfillment, but also the foundation of Israel's history is dramatically indicated by two books in the New Testament, the Epistle to the Hebrews, and Revelation.

There is much material in the Epistle to the Hebrews which makes clear the relationship between Old and New Testaments, and there is much that speaks of Christ as the fulfiller of Israel. Yet in some decisive instances, this order is reversed. When, for example, the author is discussing the sanctuary in which Moses served, and which had to be purified by the shedding of blood, which shedding is then used as a prefigurement of the necessity of Christ's sacrifice, he mentions that Moses serves a "copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary" (8:5). That is to say, the reality of which the Old Testament sanctuary was a copy is the reality in which Christ himself serves as High Priest (*cf.* 8:6, 9:11ff)! Christ here is the reality of which the Old Testament is but the shadow! This is indicated even more clearly in the discussion of Melchizedek. The author is attempting to show that Christ is superior to the Old Testament cultus, as High Priest,

because he belongs to a different, and superior, order of priesthood than that of Aaron, the priest of the Hebrew Temple-cultus. The author does this by showing that Abraham, the ancestor of Aaron (and therefore of all Israelite priests), in giving tithes to Melchizedek, acknowledges that Melchizedek is superior. This is then confirmed when Melchizedek blesses Abraham, since, the author observes, only a superior blesses an inferior (*cf.* 7:4ff). Therefore, concludes the author, since Christ is High Priest of the order of Melchizedek, he is superior to the High Priest of the order of Aaron. In this way, the comparison is drawn between Christ and Melchizedek. Yet at a decisive point, this order of fulfillment is reversed. It is not Christ who is compared to Melchizedek, but Melchizedek to Christ. When the author wants to identify Melchizedek, he says "he is without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life, but *resembling the Son of God*, he continues a priest forever" (7:3; italics mine).<sup>7</sup> Here the decisive inversion has taken place. It is not Melchizedek who underlies Christ, the Son of God. Rather, the Son of God underlies Melchizedek. The reality to which Melchizedek points in the Old Testament is therefore precisely the reality that underlies him and gives him significance. Melchizedek resembles the Son of God: Christ thus underlies the Old Testament history Melchizedek represents.

This point is made even more dramatically in the Book of Revelation, when the author describes the New Jerusalem. He writes of the wall in this way: "It had a great high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed." That is, in the New Jerusalem, Israel itself, the twelve tribes, would be included. But then the author continues: "And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." The reality which underlies and supports the twelve tribes of Israel is the reality of Christ himself (Rev. 21:12ff). It is Christ who underlies the reality of Israel, and thus of the Old Testament, and is therefore the Alpha as well as the Omega.

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<sup>7</sup> All Biblical quotations, unless otherwise identified, are taken from the Revised Standard Version.

It is this understanding of Christ as the center of time, and therefore both beginning and end, that led the New Testament authors to find him throughout the Old Testament. The purpose of God, which was being set forward by means of Israel, is decisively enacted in Jesus of Nazareth. What area of Israel would thus not be related to this Christ? It is this understanding of the nature of time, and of the centrality of Christ to all time, that informs the New Testament use of the Old Testament, not the desire to find, at any cost and regardless of context, some proof in the Old Testament to bolster the beliefs they held. The New Testament finds Christ in the Old Testament for theological, not expediential, reasons.

In sum, then, Christ is seen as God's decisive act in history, which has introduced into history the goal to which all of history is moving, in accordance with God's purposes—redemption and resurrection. Therefore, Christ is the center of history, because with him, God acted decisively to set forward his purpose, in him God set history forward toward a new goal: the life of the son of God, not the death of the sons of Adam.<sup>8</sup>

It is this act, therefore, which sets history off on another tack, which moves it in the direction God wants it to go. And he moves it in this direction whether men recognize that fact or not. The new Adam has appeared, he has been raised from the dead, and this event is decisive for injecting a new reality into history, whether a given group of men happen to recognize that fact or not. The fact that God sent his son in the likeness of sinful flesh, that the son became a curse for our sake, and by his death lifted the curse from us, the fact that he died for our sins and rose from the dead to defeat the ultimate power of death in history—all that is true whether a man happens to know about it, or accept it, or not.

### III

To return to our major theme, we have affirmed that the primary act of God in Christ is not to tell us something new about God, it

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<sup>8</sup> This is the significance of Rom. 5:12ff and the first and second Adam: history has been turned around and is now heading toward the life introduced by Christ, not the death introduced by Adam. For that reason, death has lost its sting, and has been swallowed up in victory. In Christ, death, the last enemy, is defeated.

is not to impart some bit of divine information. It is rather to achieve God's purpose of redemption. Revelation (of information) is therefore not the purpose of this act of God. Its purpose is redemptive. Its purpose is to inject a qualitatively new reality into history. Therefore, God acts primarily neither to bring us new information about God (as, for example, Wm. Barclay argues in his *The Mind of Paul* and *The Mind of Christ*), nor is the purpose "to make us aware of truth which, it seems, we once knew but had forgotten" (John Knox, *The Ethic of Jesus in the Teaching of the NT*, p. 51). The purpose of those acts is to bring history to the goal God desires. And he does this by acting in certain specific events in history, rather than in history as a whole, thus making some events in history qualitatively different from others in that some are filled with God's acts to achieve his (redemptive) purpose, while others are not. To repeat our thesis: God acts not to impart information, but to achieve his purposes in history. Revelation is therefore, as it were, the "by-product" of God's acts in history, not their primary purpose.

If, however, revelation is not the primary reason for God's acts, revelation is nevertheless the result of God's acts. If the Biblical view of God's acts in history does not put prime emphasis on revelation as the imparting of information, it nevertheless does put considerable emphasis on precisely this point. Therefore, though revelation is not the primary purpose of God's acts, it is nevertheless extremely important that man pay heed to what these acts say about God's purposes, and therefore about God himself. Though God acts to do something other than simply to impart information, those acts nevertheless do impart information, and it is of utmost importance that all men need this information, so they may work with, not against, God's purpose.

With such a statement, we enter the area of the relationship between God's redemptive acts in history, and faith, by means of which alone we can discern in these events something of the purpose and the nature of God. We have discussed at some length the fact that those acts within which God sets forth his purpose are seen in the New Testament to be of a different quality. In them, eternity is at work. God's purpose invades human time, and becomes reality within it. This is the "objective" nature of such acts



of God in history. They are of such quality whether they are so recognized or not. God uses Assyria for his purposes whether Assyria recognizes that or not (Isaiah 10:5ff). God raises up Cyrus to fulfill his purpose whether Cyrus happens to recognize that fact or not (Is. 45:1-6). But one cannot recognize the hand of God in these specific events through the exercise of reason (*i.e.* the attempt to distill something from the sum total of all events), simply because God is not at work in every event in history in the same way.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to come to some decision about the nature of God's acts in history. It is necessary to make a decision concerning which events are the result of God moving history toward his goal, and which are not. That decision is faith. Therefore, the hand of God moving within history, setting it forward in certain particular events (Israel, Christ, the Church) and not in others, can be perceived by the eyes of faith alone. One cannot discern God's purpose for history if one does not know which events are the result of God's divine acts, and one cannot discern those events apart from the eye of faith.

It is at this point that the cognitive element of revelation comes to the fore. If the hand of God moves men and nations, it also moves men to speak the prophetic word which illumines that event for man. The event would be God at work whether or not the prophetic voice is heard (*cf.* Isaiah 6:9f), but it is only by listening to the prophetic word that we can identify a given act as God's act, done to accomplish his purpose. And the prophetic word is received only by faith, *i.e.* it cannot be authenticated by appeal to any events other than those to which the prophetic word points. To see God's purpose in particular events in history remains a possibility for faith alone to the end of the world, since to authenticate faith by some other means, one would have to have such

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<sup>9</sup> This is not to say that there are parts of history which are beyond God's control, or which remain outside the purview of his purpose. God is surely sovereign over the sum total of all historical events. The point to be made here, however, is that he is not at work equally in all events of that history. The goal God has for the sum total of history is being worked out, and therefore visible, only in the history of his dealings with Israel and, through Christ, with the Church. The ultimate goal of history is now visible in the events to which the Bible witnesses because, according to that witness, God's universal redemptive purpose is being worked out in those particular events.

other means open—*i.e.* that the meaning of history could be discerned from the sum total of history. Since that is not the case, until history does reach its goal with its final consummation, faith alone will be able to perceive God's actions within history which set forward his redemptive design. This prophetic word, which is integral, if secondary, to God's act within history, is contained within the Scriptures. Therefore the Scriptures witness to certain events within which God is at work, setting forth his redemptive purpose. Because it is God's purpose, it will be accomplished, whether men understand or not (we are still saved by what God does, not by what we know), but because God is at work in some events and not in others, it is of utmost importance that we and all men know that purpose (through faith), so that we may work with it (obedience); lest through ignorance or perversity (unfaith) we work counter to it (disobedience). Not to know God's purposes may result in moving against the stream of history, and thus not having a share in the goal toward which it moves. Disobedience can therefore have dire consequences. But God will move history to that goal, whether particular men are for him or against him.

The primary illustration of this fact is the crucifixion, which is also, in the New Testament witness, the primary act of God. That is, we can see the New Testament understanding of history most clearly in that event which the New Testament says is God's decisive act in history. According to the New Testament witness, Jesus was destined to be the redeemer of the world since its foundation. This Jesus was born in a particular time, in a particular place, the member of a particular people. He came to his own people, and they had a choice. They could recognize in this Jesus God's decisive act of deliverance, and thus heed his message, or they could reject him as an imposter, and ignore his message. The New Testament indicates that the leaders of this people chose to reject him. That is to say, they did not agree that in this event, God was working decisively to accomplish his redemptive purpose. They regarded Jesus as a blasphemer and imposter, and, in an effort to silence him, *i.e.* in the attempt to make sure that what he said would not be accomplished—that in him God was working decisively—they put him to death. In that way, they

sought to silence his claims. By this act, they illustrated their refusal to see in this person a decisive act of God. Yet it is the unanimous witness of the New Testament that precisely this act of rejection was then used by God as the very instrument of his redemption: the cross and ensuing resurrection. Thus, God used the very rejection of the Pharisees to accomplish his plan of redemption for all men, including the Pharisees.

The disciples, on the other hand, recognized in this Jesus God's decisive act, and they therefore accepted his message, and followed him. Later, they announced the fact that Jesus had in fact been God's decisive act of redemption. The disciples, in contrast to the Pharisees, accepted Jesus as God's decisive act of redemption, and they became the instruments by which this fact was then announced. The point, therefore, is this: no matter how men decided, God used that decision to set forward his redemptive purpose. God used *both* the negative decision of the rulers *and* the positive decision of the disciples to accomplish his purpose. God's will will therefore be done, he will accomplish his purposes in history, whether any man or group of men be for him, against him, or ignorant of him. God is Lord of history, and history will obey his will.

This same idea of the irresistibility of God's purpose being enacted in history is also illustrated in Jesus' own preaching. Jesus never announced: "Repent, or the Kingdom of God won't come for you." Jesus said: "Repent, *because* the Kingdom of God has drawn near," and any man's lack of repentance cannot alter that fact. The Kingdom is coming, whether men like it or not, whether men be for it or not. The announcement simply gives a man a chance to decide: is this true?—and then the man may act on that decision, either in obedience to God's purposes, his will, or contrary to it. The same point is made in parable after parable. The preparation or lack of it on the part of the ten virgins did not affect the bridegroom's return, but it did affect their part in the ensuing celebration. The refusal of the invited guests to accept the invitation to the great feast did not cause the feast to be cancelled. It simply meant they had no part in it. The complaint of the elder brother did not lead to the cancellation of the celebration at the prodigal's return, any more than the complaint of the work-

ers hired first altered the wage scale, but in both instances, those complaining were met with a rebuke. Jesus' emphasis time after time is: prepare now, while there is still time, lest you be caught unprepared, like the man whose house was robbed, like the lazy servants caught in mid-task by the returning householder. Jesus never says, unless you get ready, the Kingdom won't come. The message is always: be ready, or you will not be included. This same emphasis comes out quite clearly in two sayings of Jesus, uttered on different occasions, but making the same point: however men decide, God's will will be done. In the scene in the upper room, at the time of the last supper, Jesus speaks of his betrayal: "For the Son of man goes as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed" (Luke 22:22). The point is unmistakable: God's purpose will be enacted, one way or another, but this does not absolve a man from his decision to be for it or against it. God will achieve his purpose, but it is man's responsibility to be a willing or an unwilling instrument. He cannot choose not to be an instrument, but he can choose to be an obedient or a disobedient instrument. The other example is found in Mt. 18:7, when Jesus says: "Woe to the world for temptations to sin. For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the man by whom the temptation comes." The point is the same: certain things are determined necessary in God's inscrutable will, but it is of utmost importance for any given man to react obediently to that will, lest in attempting to resist it, he be crushed. For God will do what he has purposed to do.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

(Isaiah 55:10-11)

## II. FAITH AND ABRAHAM IN PAUL

We have argued that the point of God's acts in history is to move that history to the goal he desires. In the light of that argu-

ment, we shall now examine a specific problem in the New Testament—Paul's use of Abraham as an example of faith reckoned as righteousness—to see how such a view of history, and God's part in it, can illuminate what otherwise appears to be an unresolved difficulty in exegesis.

## I

One of the more recurring themes in the epistles of Paul is the centrality of Christ for Paul's own life, and for the life of every Christian. One can with accuracy term Paul a "Christ-intoxicated man." This is demonstrated in a variety of ways. Paul tells his readers in Philippi that for the sake of Christ, he would willingly suffer the loss of all things, as in fact he did. Once he was a respected leader of his people. Now he is a hunted and hated outcast, despised by those with whom he once agreed and worked. But once Christ confronted him on the road outside Damascus, all that changed. He shifted course right about, and became an apostle of Christ, one who could claim that he worked harder than any other. Therefore, for Paul's personal life, Christ became the center.

Christ also became the center of Paul's theology. Indeed, that is not surprising, because Paul lived his faith, and the Christ that was at the center of the faith would therefore also be the center of Paul the man of faith. The continuing, almost monotonous refrain "in Christ" shows to what extent Paul saw the Christian faith in terms of Christology. He is almost Johannine in his insistence that the sum total of God's will for man is expressed in Christ, through whom alone one has access to the father. Nor will Paul shy away from attributing the most exalted position to the risen Christ: he now sits at the right hand of God the Father (the seat of honor) and receives homage from every living creature, because he now bears the sacred name of God himself (*cf.* Phil. 2:9ff). This Christ is also the very heart and purpose of all creation. He is the element which binds everything into an integrated whole. He is the one who provides coherence to the whole universe, and without him, chaos would once again invade the realm of order God began at creation. Therefore literally nothing can be understood apart from Christ (*cf.* Col. 1:15ff). The similarity, again to



Johannine thought, particularly the prologue to the Fourth Gospel, may be noted.

Because of this central importance of Christ for the totality of the cosmos, Paul can logically affirm that apart from this Christ, no man can make anything of himself or his world. Apart from Christ a man is as good as dead. His sins are still upon him. He can do nothing right. He can only be an enemy of God. Therefore, Christ becomes the center of Paul's preaching, for only in this Christ, only in terms of him, can a man become what he is supposed to be, can a man be delivered from the travail in which he is involved in this life. Apart from Christ, a man belongs to the race of Adam which, like its disobedient head, is moving toward death, the inevitable result of enmity with God. Only because of Christ, who rose from the dead, and thus shattered the power of death, can a man escape from the humanity of Adam to the humanity of Christ, which is moving toward life. What Christ has done is to interpose himself between God and sinful Adam, to use figurative language, and has taken upon himself the burden Everyman ought to bear. For us men, Paul says, Christ became a curse, that the curse might no longer rest on us.

There is therefore no possibility of righteousness, of salvation, of redemption apart from Christ. Christ himself intercedes for us with the Father. Who would be foolish enough to separate himself from that Christ? Christ has conquered death for himself and for us. Who would be foolish enough to prefer death to this life-giving Christ? Apart from Christ man is subject to the wrath of God. Who would prefer to dispense with this Christ, because of whom there is now no more condemnation for those who share the benefits of his condemnation, borne on the cross?

Because of this centrality of Christ for man's relationship to God, man's relationship to Christ becomes all-important for Paul's theology. This relationship Paul terms "faith." A capsule-definition of faith, as Paul uses the word, may be given in these terms: faith is the willingness to give God room to save us by not interposing our own claims of goodness between ourselves and God's mercy in Christ, thereby acknowledging our inability to save ourselves, and our necessity of relying on God. Faith thus means to be willing to sacrifice everything for God in terms of obedience

to his will, as God has sacrificed everything for us in the death of his son. Thus, for Paul, the religious problem—getting on the right side of God—is solved in terms of a relationship to Christ, who is on the right side of God. This relationship, established by accepting Christ's fate as our fate, is what Paul means by "faith."

For this reason, Paul is so intent upon establishing the fact that faith in Christ is the only way a man can get a right relationship with God. Paul can say that our only source of life is "in Christ Jesus, whom God made our . . . righteousness" (I Cor. 1:30). That is to say, Christ is our only chance of getting on the right side of God. The reason for this, in turn, is the fact that sin, which means being on the wrong side of God, has been taken away by Christ, thus allowing us to face God without this burden. Paul says: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (II Cor. 5:21). Because Christ became what we are—sin—we can be what Christ is—righteous, *i.e.* on the right side of God. Though men were sinners of the worst type (*cf.* I Cor. 6:9ff), because of Christ men have been put into a right relationship with God (*cf.* I Cor. 6:11). Therefore, if one is related to Christ and his righteousness, the ultimate power of sin, *i.e.* death, has been overcome. Paul writes: "But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin (*i.e.* that because of sin, man suffers corruptibility), your spirits are alive because of righteousness (*i.e.* you share the hope of resurrection, as Christ was raised)."

Because Christ is therefore man's only hope for getting right with God, and because one can only be related to Christ by faith, *i.e.* by accepting him and rejecting one's own self as the reason for salvation, for that reason, a man's salvation is, for Paul, ineluctably bound to Christ. Salvation demands that one confess with the lips that Jesus is Lord, and believe in the heart (*i.e.* stake your life before God on it) that God raised him from the dead. For this reason also Paul is so severe on the law, when it is seen as an alternate, or even ancillary, means of salvation. Paul will allow no such thing. To attempt to get right with God in this way means one is severed from Christ, which means, Paul continues, to have "fallen from grace" (Gal. 5:4-5). In fact, the whole epistle to the Galatians is one long argument against the possibility of any other

means of getting right with God except Christ. Through faith in Christ alone does a man become a son of God (Gal. 3:25ff), even if one belongs to the nation that God once called his "Son" when he brought it out of Egypt (*cf.* Gal. 2:15ff). A man's ancestors do not count, whether Jew or Gentile. All mankind, and therefore every man, was crucified with Christ, and so a man can continue to live only "by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

## II

This whole line of argument is put forward with single-minded concentration in the Epistle to the Romans. All men are trapped in sin, all have fallen short of what they were created to be, and for that reason man's only hope for redemption is grace, which is a gift. He cannot hope for a reward or wages, for they can only be condemnation (*cf.* Rom. 6:23). This gift God has given in Christ, and the only way this gift can be received is as a gift, *i.e.* by faith (as against receiving it as wages, *i.e.* by right). Therefore, God's act in Christ shows God will redeem man, and he will redeem the man "who has faith in Jesus" (*c.f.* Rom. 3:26; the whole of the above argument is taken from Romans 3:22ff). Apart from this Jesus, man is doomed to idolatry (Rom. 1:18ff) and therefore to sin (Rom. 3:9ff). Only in him can a man have righteousness (Rom. 3:21ff).

To this point in Romans (the first three chapters), Paul's argument is easy to follow: a man's hope of getting right with God lies in his relationship to him by faith in Jesus Christ, and not through any other means, legal or otherwise. Therefore, faith is primary, even over the law of Moses. In attempting to prove that primacy, indeed the priority, of faith over the law, Paul turns, in both instances where this argument is entered (Romans 3:21ff, Galatians 2:15ff), to Abraham as the example that salvation by faith, not law, has been God's plan all along. Abraham thus becomes the figure by means of whom Paul attempts to show that God never intended the law to be an alternate way of salvation over-against Christ.

It is precisely at this point that the problem arises. If Christ is



God's unique act of salvation for man, and if the only way man can be saved is through faith in him, then how could Abraham, who had never even heard of Jesus Christ, have been made righteous by faith? The question is even sharper put the other way around, the way we must put it if Paul is serious in this argument. We must ask: if Abraham was indeed righteous by faith before he could know anything about Jesus Christ, how can we say that Christ is the necessary element in our salvation? If Abraham was saved by faith, without knowing Jesus Christ, then how can Paul say, as he does again and again, that there is no salvation apart from Jesus Christ? The question can be pressed: if Abraham was saved by faith in God, without knowing of Jesus Christ, cannot men today be saved by faith in God, without having to accept all the Christological baggage? Does not Paul's argument seem to indicate that the primary element is faith as such, rather than faith in Christ? How is this problem to be solved? Has Paul involved himself in a contradiction here, through his desire to prove his point? Has he overlooked the fact that in demonstrating the priority of *faith*, one half of his theological program, he has apparently eliminated the absolute necessity of the second half, the necessity of faith *in Christ*? In short, how can Paul affirm the uniqueness and absolute necessity of Christ for our righteousness, and still affirm that Abraham was righteous by faith?

The problem remains acute, indeed virtually insoluble, so long as God's acts in history are conceived of primarily in cognitive terms. If revelation is the purpose of God's acts in history, and thus if new information is the primary result of those acts, and if, in turn, faith is the medium whereby we gain this knowledge, *i.e.* accept it as valid revelation, then it is difficult to see how Abraham and the Christian can stand on the same level, as Paul seems to think. If Christ is God's decisive act in history, understood in terms of Christ being the ultimate revelation of the nature of God, then surely those who accept Christ as that revelation, through faith, know more about God than did Abraham, who accepted such information as he had, through faith. How then can Abraham lie in a direct line with the Christian, indeed, even serve as a model of faith? So long as this is the view of the significance of God's acts within history, so long the problem of extent of revelation,

and thus of degrees of knowledge about God will be a problem. If God acts to impart information, then each new act will add some information to the general fund of information, and thus revelation, in terms of knowledge of God, will accumulate, will progress, so that at any given stage, people will know more about God than those who went before. Now if this be true, surely we know more about God than did Abraham, especially since we have Christ. How then, if we can only be righteous through faith in Christ, *i.e.* because in Christ we now know what God is like, how then can Abraham also have been reckoned righteous by faith, when he didn't really know what God was like? In short, either Paul has got himself involved in a hopeless contradiction at this point, led into it by attempting to overcome the significance of the law, and not realizing the consequences of this attempt to his idea of the uniqueness of Christ, or else Paul understands the significance of God's acts in some other way.

### III

The second alternative, we shall argue, is the correct one. Paul does not think that the acts of God are performed primarily to impart information about God. This is clear, for example, when he talks about Christ and Adam in Rom. 5:12ff. The whole discussion is of events that take place beyond the realm of cognition, as it were. Christ, by rising from the dead, abolishes the death which was the inevitable result of Adam's sin. Paul says that "as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19), and he says it as though it were a fact whether the sinners happened to know about it, or understand it, or not. The same sort of thing is evident in his statement that "while we were yet helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6), and a bit later "while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his son" (5:10). The purpose of God's act here was not to impart information, it was to reconcile us through the death of his son, while we were still enemies, still helpless. God in Christ set history decisively on the road toward its goal, toward a new creation aimed at life through Christ, not aimed at death through Adam. This is the significance of these statements.

But this is not something God suddenly began with Christ. History has been since its beginning moving in the direction that God wants it to move. Paul's allusions to the Old Testament confirm that: God was at work in the exodus (Rom. 9:17), he was at work in the wilderness-wanderings of Israel (I Cor. 10:1ff), he was even at work when the law was given (Gal. 3:15ff). And Christ is the final and decisive act of the God who by his acts has moved history toward his desired goal (*cf.* II Cor. 1:20). It is precisely in this framework that Abraham finds his place. Abraham too was God's instrument for moving history in the "right direction;" Abraham was the bearer of the promise which was ultimately to be fulfilled in Christ. God's act *vis-a-vis* Abraham was to set him out on a journey which would ultimately lead to the creation of a people, a people whose mission would be finally fulfilled in the man Christ Jesus. That this was God's purpose is indicated by the fact that this act upon Abraham is called a promise, *i.e.* in this act history has begun to move to its fulfillment. And Abraham accepted this promise, says Paul, *i.e.* he chose to obey God's act on his behalf. This is just the point Paul is making in Rom. 4:18-22. Abraham was fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. "That," says Paul "is why his faith was 'reckoned to him as righteousness.'" It was because Abraham accepted God's purpose as his own purpose, he accepted God's history as his history, he accepted God's act for him in history and its ramifications as the basis of his own personal history. His acceptance of God's purpose (faith) led him to desire in his history what God desired in history (righteousness). That is to say, Abraham was obedient to God's act in history for him, and thus he was for God, not against him. He willed to fulfill God's purpose, he did not work against it.

Now, Paul continues (Rom. 4:24), "it (righteousness) will be reckoned to us who believe in him that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification." As the promise that he would be the father of a great nation, and a blessing to mankind, was God's purpose for Abraham, in line with his total redemptive purpose for all mankind, so the act, within history, of Christ's dying and rising shows God's purpose for us. We, therefore, must be obedient to God's

historic act for us, as Abraham was for God's historic act for him. We must accept God's purposes in history as our purposes in history, we must accept the history God is leading to his desired goal as our history. We must be obedient to the direction that God is moving history. If we do this, we too are righteous by faith, *i.e.* we too accept and will God's purpose for history. In short, righteousness by faith means to be obedient to God's act in history *for us*. Therefore, by being obedient to God's act in Christ we are righteous by faith, just as Abraham, obedient to God's act in history for him, was righteous by faith. The difference between Abraham and the Christian is not a difference in degree or kind of knowledge about God. The difference is one of historical situation. And the similarity between Abraham and the Christian is not a similarity in content of knowledge, but a similar act of obedience to God's act, and thus his purpose, in history. Therefore, the central element is God's decisive act, which sets history forward in the direction God wants it to move, not some bit of information about God which enables us then to save ourselves. Faith is related to God's purposive acts in history, not to some eternal truths about the nature of the Deity.<sup>1</sup>

In this way, Abraham was righteous by faith, just as the Christian is righteous by faith. But more, the Christian can accept that righteousness only by obedience to God's act in Christ, which is God's act *for him*. Therefore we cannot bypass Christ in an effort to repeat Abraham's faith, *i.e.* his decision to let God's plan for

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<sup>1</sup> The point here is of course not that God's purposive acts do not also provide information about God's purposes. If they did not, then Abraham could not have made his decision to let God's way be his way. The point is, however, that such information is not the sole and exhaustive purpose of God's acts. The primary purpose of the act is that what God's desires be accomplished, *i.e.* that the act sets history going in the direction he wants it to go. And that is the direction it will go, no matter what man may decide, whether he decides to accept it as revealing God's purpose (faith) or not (unfaith). The point is simply that unfaith cannot set aside the result of God's act in history, nor alter the purpose being worked out in history. Abraham tried to fulfill God's purpose in a way other than God's, *i.e.* in unfaith, and the result was Ishmael, "a wild ass of a man, his hand against every man, and every man's hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen" (Gen. 16:12). God will fulfill his purpose in his own way—that is the point of, and the reason for, his acts. But his acts also can reveal his purposes to the eye of faith, and the man of faith must then respond in obedience to God's purpose.

him in history be his own plan, simply because with the coming of Jesus Christ, history has been decisively changed, and Abraham's history (a history prior to Jesus Christ) no longer exists. In Jesus Christ, God's ultimate act in history has been performed, and thus his ultimate purpose for man has been made reality within history. To repeat Abraham's faithful decision about history and God's purpose within it, we must accept God's act in Christ as the decisive act in our personal history, for in this acceptance we find our place in God's purpose for all of history.

In sum, it is not *in spite of* Paul's understanding of Abraham, but precisely *because of* his understanding of Abraham, and the fact that he was made righteous by faith, that Paul can insist there is no righteousness apart from Christ. He can do this not by ignoring Abraham as a historic person, but just because he takes Abraham very seriously as a historic person. Paul can equate Abraham's righteousness with the righteousness we have by faith in Christ, and at the same time insist that we can become thus righteous only through faith in Christ, because the decisive point of similarity is God's act within history, which sets history moving in accordance with his purpose. If the point of God's acts in history were to provide information, then the relationship between Abraham's righteousness and ours in Christ would be of a different quality, because in Christ (as God's ultimate act) we would have more information. But this is not the case. Righteousness by faith for Paul means to make God's history our history, and his purposes our purposes. When Abraham did that, he was reckoned righteous, and when we accept Christ as God's act, we too are reckoned righteous (*cf.* Rom. 4:23f). Abraham can therefore become paradigmatic for the Christian, because as he accepted God's purposes in history for his own, so we must accept God's purpose in history (Christ) as our own. Then we too are sons of Abraham, who had faith.

### III. HISTORY AND THE GOSPEL OF MARK

We have thus far examined the emphasis in the New Testament on history as the arena within which God acts to move history along the way He desires it to go, and we have seen how such a view of history underlies the way in which Paul uses Abraham as

an example of faith being reckoned as righteousness. We must now turn to an examination of another type of literature in the New Testament—the Gospels—and see in what way this view of history is reflected in it as well. We will limit our attention to the Gospel of Mark, because it is, in all probability, the first example of this kind of literature, and because it seems to have been one of the sources upon which the other two synoptic Gospels drew.

That the view of history represented by the synoptic Gospels in general, and Mark in particular, is such that it can give rise to problems is amply demonstrated by the course which Markan studies have followed in the past decades. Once the priority of Mark over Matthew and Luke was generally recognized, attention was devoted to Mark as the primary source of information about Jesus of Nazareth. The 19th century saw in Mark a historical source of the kind that century most valued: an account of a historical personage, told with due attention to the cause and effect relationships within historic events, and presenting its information within a relatively reliable chronological sequence. If that sequence had on occasion to be corrected, it was to reveal more clearly and adequately the historical truth embedded in the Markan narrative. This view of the Gospels was responsible for the "Life of Jesus" movement which dominated Biblical scholarship during the past century, and which extended into the first decades of this century. A reaction to this view of Mark announced itself with the appearance of W. Wrede's book on the messianic secret in the Gospels (*Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien*). Wrede's contention was that Mark was not at all reliable as sober history, and he proceeded to show how, on the basis of "scientific" historical canons, large parts of Mark were **historically unreliable**—the miracles, the predictions of the passion, the emphasis on secrecy, the idea that Jesus avoided the term "Messiah" because of its political overtones. As a result of the work of Wrede, and others who followed him (the whole "Formcritical" school), Mark came to be viewed not as history, but as sermon. The Gospels became, in the eyes of scholars, the reflection of the early preaching of the Church, with only the thinnest veneer of history upon them, and that veneer largely, if not totally unreliable, even unimportant. Most of what had passed for history in the 19th century now

tended to look like legend or myth, the result of the transmission of traditions by the primitive community of faith. The important item now was the content of the faith here proclaimed. This view led logically into the movement of demythologizing, which attempts to free the message of faith from its now-antiquated thought-forms.<sup>1</sup>

Mark has therefore been understood, within the past 100 years, in ways diametrically opposed—as a legitimate source for a sequentially-accurate picture of the life of Jesus, and as the record of the earliest preaching which did not really concern itself with history at all (since true faith cannot, said the scholars, be verified by historical “proof”). How then is the view of history presupposed by the Markan narrative to be understood?

## I

Before we attempt to answer that question, we must first inquire about the significance of the Gospel as a literary form, for this will help us defining our problem more sharply. As has been frequently pointed out, a “Gospel” is an entirely new kind of literary *genre*, with no real parallels in the ancient world. The Jewish religious milieu, out of which the Christian faith sprang, had long revered the words of the famous rabbis, and had already begun to collect them (*cf. Pirké Aboth*). That collections of the sayings of Jesus should be made was therefore only to be expected. But the Gospels differ from such collections of rabbinic sayings in two important respects.

In the first place, the Gospels record at least as many acts of Jesus as they record sayings, something which occurred only rarely, if at all, in the rabbinic collections of wise sayings. Further, the words and acts of Jesus are intimately related, to the extent that in many cases, the words, particularly the parables, serve simply to define and defend what Jesus does. The parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Mt. 20:1ff), for example, quite evidently is meant to defend Jesus against the charge that he acts in an ungodly

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the problem along similar lines, *cf.* J. M. Robinson's *The Problem of History in Mark* (Naperville: A. R. Allenson, 1957), the first few pages.

way when he consorts with sinners. The point of the parable—"do you begrudge my generosity"—is the defense of Jesus' acts: do you begrudge God's generosity, made concrete in my acceptance of sinners, to those who do not deserve it? And in a unique way, Jesus' acts and words are related to his person, so that the mystery of his person provides the key to the significance of what he says and does (cf. Mk. 4:11).

The gospels differ from the collections of rabbinic sayings in another important respect. The gospels tend more often than not to report a saying in relation to a particular historical event in the life of Jesus. Thus, one gets the impression that knowledge of the sayings alone is not sufficient to understand the significance either of this Jesus himself, or of what he says. Further, the fact that, especially in Mark, the narrative of the events of Passion Week occupies a disproportionate amount of space in relation to the duration of the events, indicates that Jesus' death upon the cross, and the ensuing resurrection, were more significant than any other single thing he did or said. Thus, the gospels indicate that the fate of this man is essential to understand the importance of what he said and did. At this point, the Gospel accounts differ widely from contemporary Jewish collections of sayings. A rabbi's sayings were full of wisdom and thus significant regardless of what fate befell him. Apparently, in the viewpoint represented in the gospels, this is not the case with Jesus. One had to know more about him than what he said and an occasional anecdote relating something he did. One had to see the whole of his career in the light of his ultimate act: his suffering and death on the cross.<sup>2</sup>

In the very form of the Gospel as a literary entity, therefore, the importance of the historical setting and the content of the historical career of Jesus is indicated. One cannot understand the words of Jesus as expressions of timeless, eternal truths of morals and religion. Rather, their significance is intimately bound to the historical course of this person's life. Therefore, the importance of history, and the significance of the historical events in which Jesus

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<sup>2</sup> Much of the information contained in this analysis was gleaned from J. Schniewind's "Zur Synoptiker-Exegese" in *Theologische Rundschau*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1930.



of Nazareth participated, are indicated in the very form the early Church created in order to narrate this material.

## II

Careful analysis of the three gospels placed side by side, however, and of the structure of the individual gospels, particularly Mark, has indicated that if the gospels are concerned with history, they are nevertheless concerned with a different kind of history than we usually describe with that word. The gospels show by their construction that they are not interested in a teacher of timeless truths, but they also show that they are not primarily concerned with sequentially accurate narratives, either in a chronological or a geographic sense.

Whatever else may be said of the way in which the "form critics" applied their methods to the synoptic gospels, they have demonstrated in a rather compelling manner that chronological accuracy, either in terms of sequence of events, or in terms of the day or days within which these events took place, was not a primary concern of the evangelist who put together the Gospel of Mark. That the gospels cannot be made to yield chronological information in the sense of a clear, sequential account of the happenings in Jesus' life becomes evident when one studies carefully the framework of the gospel of Mark, and the way in which it was used by the authors of Matthew and Luke.

When one considers the way in which Matthew and Luke make use of the material they found in Mark, one is immediately struck by the freedom they felt over-against the Marcan arrangement. They add or delete details apparently as they see fit, in some cases to the extent of changing the point of the story. They do the same when it comes to Mark's arrangement of stories, i.e. the sequence of events in Mark. Consider, for example, the little series of events outlined in Mark 2:1-3:6. A comparison of the three synoptic gospels will show that Matthew and Luke reflect Mark's wording so consistently in their reports of these events that Mark is quite clearly the source of their information. Luke reproduces the order of these events, *i.e.* he respects the sequence of Mark's narrative. Matthew, on the other hand, does not. He simply uses three of the

events in the order they now appear, detaches the last two, and uses them at an entirely different point in Jesus' career. But lest one think Luke's faithfulness to Mark's order in this instance indicates Luke's desire to preserve the sequence of the Marcan narrative, consider the events recorded in Mark 1:21ff. This is rather clearly the source of the material contained in Luke 4:31ff, indicating Luke knew Mark in essentially the same form Mark now has. Mark's order of events is: calling the disciples (Peter first), and healing in the synagogue in Capernaum. Yet Luke does not hesitate to reverse this order, recounting the healing first, and only then the call of Peter. If one would find a sequentially-accurate record of the events in the life of Jesus in the synoptic gospels, or if one would desire to construct such a record, one is faced with a dilemma: are Matthew and Luke correct when they change the Marcan order, or do they distort a more reliable source? Does one, in this latter instance, choose Mark as the older and more original source, or Luke as presenting a psychologically better-motivated sequence? A clear indication of which is correct is not to be had.

As a matter of fact, the author/editor of Mark seems to have had no intention of producing a clear and reliable, sequentially-accurate narrative. This fact is indicated clearly enough in the materials contained in Mark 4:1-5:43. The last indication of time in this section occurs in 4:35, where, after a day spent preaching to the multitudes (4:1ff), Jesus goes, in late afternoon, by boat, to the area of Gerasene (4:35). There he heals a demoniac, and, after news of it attracts people from the nearby city, he is asked to leave the area. Jesus then returns to the west shore of the sea, heals a woman, and journeys to the house of a leader of the synagogue to heal his child. All of this, if we take the Marcan chronological indications seriously, happened in one day, indeed, in the late afternoon of one day! If this is so, then, in the Marcan framework, a significant portion of Jesus' public work in Galilee took place in one day! If, on the other hand, as seems obvious, this cannot all have happened in late afternoon, it becomes clear that Mark has been careless in providing us with sufficient notations of time. Therefore, we must conclude either that Mark did not mean this to take place in one day, in which case Mark is not

intent upon providing a chronology, or that he did, in which case his chronology can hardly be taken seriously. In either case, a reliable chronology is not to be had from the Marcan narrative as it now stands.

The same problem confronts the reader who attempts to discern an accurate spatial sequence, *i.e.* an itinerary based on geographic references. Let one example suffice. As scholars have pointed out, the Greek phrase *eis to peran* (lit. "to the other side"), means in the gospels almost without exception the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. It denotes the "other side of the Jordan," the eastern, non-Jewish shore. Yet in Mark, we have two sea-journeys of Jesus, one after the other, in both of which Jesus goes *eis to peran*, *i.e.* to the eastern shore (Mk. 5:1,21). That this is a problem is indicated by the way Matthew and Luke handle the second reference in Mark 5:21. Matthew simply omits mention of it altogether, and begins his story with a parallel to Mark 5:22. Luke, on the other hand, changes the phrase to *hypostrephein*, which means simply "return." Luke keeps the sea-voyage, but he interprets it as a return voyage, thus solving the problem. Thus, Matthew and Luke were forced to do exactly what modern scholars must do when they attempt to get a sequentially-accurate account of Jesus' career: they must alter or omit certain things in order to achieve their goal.

Examples of this sort can be multiplied almost endlessly throughout all three synoptic gospels. And we have not even touched on some of the basic problems injected into the discussion when one includes the Fourth Gospel as evidence. Here some really basic problems of sequence emerge, *e.g.* did the cleansing of the Temple happen early in Jesus' career, as in John, or late, as in the synoptics? Did Jesus' ministry last about one year, as the synoptics clearly imply (perhaps only a few short months in Mark!), or the three years indicated in John? And what of the day of the crucifixion? Was it the day of the Passover festival, as the synoptics tell it, or was it the day before, as John, with historical probability on his side, maintains?

We are faced, therefore, with a basic problem: if the literary creation of the gospel-form indicates that the Christian understanding of Jesus could not fairly be represented in terms of time-

less truth, presented in the form of a collection of wise sayings, but had rather to be seen within a historical context, the content of the gospels, on the other hand, clearly indicate that the early Church did not think that sequential accuracy or chronological precision were necessary companions of the history they were attempting to set down. The question is this: how can they have been interested in history, but not in chronology?

### III

Once again, the answer lies in the historical perspective within which the writers of the gospels, in this case particularly Mark, operate. Their view of history apparently is such that within it, indeed within particular events of history, God acts to set forward his purposes. These acts of God, while they also furnish information about God's purposes and thus about God himself, nevertheless are understood as primarily intended to bring history to the goal God desires for it. Therefore, these acts within which God is at work are qualitatively different from those events in history which do not move history toward its divinely-appointed goal. It is within this historical perspective that the answer to our problem lies, the problem of how the gospels can be interested in history but not in chronology.

The point is this: if the primary aim of God's acts within history is the impartation of information, then we need all the information we can get, and we need it to be as accurate as possible. For if the primary aim is to reveal information, and thus make knowledge about God available, then to the extent that we misunderstand that information or pervert that knowledge, to that extent we frustrate God's purpose in performing these revelatory acts. If the gospel writers understood the primary purpose of such divine acts to be the revelation of information, they would have been forced to be as careful as possible about sequence, chronology, order of teaching, location of event, attendant circumstances, and much more, for some item of significance could be lost if all this were not recorded.

If, on the other hand, the gospel writers see the primary purpose of God's acts within history as redemptive, rather than revelatory,

and thus see that a man is saved by what God does in those acts, not by what the man may or may not know about them, then the necessity for chronological and geographic and sequential accuracy is considerably lessened. Then the gospel writers can take liberties with the details in order to bring sharply to the fore the real point of God's act in Christ: that in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself. If God has done that, then to be sure it is important that we realize that fact, lest we act as though that had not happened. And to act in the history that God is moving toward his goal as though he were not thus moving it is to run the risk of being crushed in the movement of that history (*cf.* Matthew 25:41ff). Therefore, if the aim of God's act in Christ is to fulfill his redemptive purpose within history, then a quantitative kind of historical writing, in which sequence and chronology are of primary importance, is not to the point. Historical writing about a divine event which has set history forward in the way God wants it to go must point out that that has in fact happened, and that a man must respond properly to such an act (*cf.* Mark 1:15).

Such a view of history also answers a rather nagging problem which recent studies of the gospels have brought to light. It is apparent that in the course of handing on the traditions of Jesus' words and deed orally, certain shifts in emphasis have taken place. This is especially the case in the parables, as J. Jeremias, among others, has made clear (*cf.* his *The Parables of Jesus*). How is it possible, it is then asked, for the early church to have exercised the kind of freedom it did in dealing with the traditions of the earthly Jesus? The common answer is that Jesus is the living Lord of the Church, and still has a word to say to the Church as that living Lord (*cf.* Rev. 1:17ff). Therefore, the early Church felt free to adapt the sayings of the Lord to reveal what the still-living Lord was saying, through the Spirit, to the Church. But such an answer answers more than it ought. If that is the case, then why bother to put it in the form of a historical discourse? Why, if the Lord of the Church now lived and rules, regard the earthly words of the Lord, his deeds and his acts, as authoritative? Why not get rid of all that at times confusing, at times perhaps misleading, baggage of the "hidden Messiah?" Why concern oneself with history when the present contains all that is needful? Yet when the Church

rejected Montanism, it reaffirmed the evangelists' rejection of such a view.

The answer to this problem—how could the Church exercise such freedom, yet feel bound to retain the historical elements of the earthly Jesus?—is rather to be found in the New Testament view of the nature of God's acts within history. God acted decisively in Jesus of Nazareth to fulfill his redemptive purpose within history. Thus any witness to what God has already done for us—this is the point of the New Testament as a document—must make it clear that God has done this within history, and that therefore it is now historical reality. But since the point is that God has done this, not to tell us about himself but to accomplish his purpose, it means that the individual details may be subordinated to the supreme fact that God has acted in history to fulfill his redemptive purpose. Thus the historical framework must be preserved—to show that what God did is historical reality, not vague ideas or "eternal truths"—but the historical details may be changed to make that point in a new situation. It is the quality of the time—that God was at work in it redemptively—that is important for the gospels, not the quantity of time: sequence, duration, *etc.*

That this is the view of history within which Mark was composed can be shown by means of two examples. The first centers about the pericopal nature of the gospel. It is quite obvious that the important materials for Mark are the individual stories of what Jesus said and did, not the order in which he did them, nor the duration of his ministry, nor the time of day in which they happened. Thus, Mark seems to feel that the quality of the time involved—that in Jesus, God is at work to set forward his redemptive purpose for history—can be seen in any act that Jesus performed, without knowing what went before and what followed. In this, Mark is simply reflecting the situation that those who knew Jesus in the flesh found themselves: those confronted with Jesus' redemptive reality did not know where he had been, or where he would go later. But in his presence, so Mark seems to say, God was at work to set forward his purpose for history. By emphasizing the quality of what Jesus did, rather than the quantity, expressed in terms of sequence or chronology, Mark shows the historical perspective within which he works: in each event, God was at

work in history, and as surely in each event as in the sum total of events. The only place the gospels seems to regard the sequence as important is in the account of the passion, but this is dictated not by a regard for sequential history as such—all that precedes denies this fact—but because the quality of the event is intimately tied up to the sequence of events themselves. In this act, Christ suffered, died and was raised, and in that order of events, as well as in their quality, God fulfilled the redemptive purpose for man that is seen in the whole life of Jesus.

In short, the purpose for which the Gospels were written: to indicate that God has acted decisively for man within history, could best be served by calling attention to the quality of that divine act within history, rather than its duration, its sequence, or its geographical details. For this purpose of demonstrating the quality of the time, the pericopal method is ideally suited.

That this view of history dominates the whole of Mark is further shown (this is the second example) by the way in which Mark begins his Gospel. Two things are clear from the way in which Mark uses the figure of John the Baptist. The first is the fact that John belongs inextricably to the mission of Jesus. In fact, the problem of the first verses of Mark points to this inextricable bond. The problem includes the first four verses, and centers on verse one. How is it to be translated, and understood? The usual solution—that it is a superscription—makes little sense. “The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ”—that is not a title, and that the beginning of the story begins at the beginning of the narrative hardly needs attention called to itself! So long as this verse is taken alone, it is relatively useless. If it said: “The Gospel of Jesus Christ,” that could serve as a title. But why the word “beginning?” If, on the other hand, we take all four verses together (omitting the quotations from the Old Testament), the translation would read as follows: “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, just as it was written in Isaiah the prophet . . . was John, who was baptizing in the desert and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin.” In short, Mark is here identifying the beginning of the good news about Jesus with the appearance of John the Baptist!

The fact that this John, who is thus inextricably bound with

the event of Jesus of Nazareth, is identified here in terms of an Old Testament quotation points to the second item that comes clear from this Marcan view of John the Baptist. The point is this: John the Baptist is the fulfillment of the whole movement of God's acts in history with Israel, he is the culmination, the final figure, whose appearance thus announces the coming of the one who sets forward God's history with man in a decisive way. This is indicated not only by the Old Testament verses chosen in Mark 1:2f, it is indicated by the fact that the figure of John conjures up the figure of Elijah, who was to return during the last times. The description of John the Baptist in Mark 1:6 recalls the description of Elijah in II Kings 1:8. This identification is confirmed by Jesus in Mark 9:11-13. But John is also described in such a way that he is also clearly the resumption of the prophetic movement (*cf.* the "hairy mantle" in Mark 1:6, which, according to Zecharia 13:9 is the mark of the prophet). John's message of return ("repentance" in English, *metanoia* in Greek, based on the prophetic *shūbh* in Hebrew) is also the message of the prophets. Thus, with John the Baptist, the age of prophecy is at once resumed and ended: he is the greatest of the prophets, but least in the Kingdom of Heaven, to which the prophets pointed (*cf.* Mt. 11:11-14).

Therefore, the beginning of God's decisive act in history—to move history to its goal—is the appearance of John the Baptist in whom the whole history of Israel is once more recapitulated. And he is the one who announces Jesus. The inference is obvious: this Jesus is the fulfillment of God's acts which he performed by means of and upon the people of Israel, to set forward his redemptive purpose within history, and therefore that people, now incorporated in John the Baptist, finds the fulfillment of its career in Jesus of Nazareth. Clearly, the historical perspective here is that of God's purposive acts within history, by means of which God moves history to his desired goal. God's saving history is now being fulfilled, a saving history which can be seen, not in the totality of all historical events, but in the history of the people of Israel, by means of which people God has been working out his purposes within history. As John points to Jesus, so Israel points to, and is fulfilled, in God's decisively redemptive historic act, Jesus of Nazareth.



## FOUR NOTES ON TEXT CRITICAL PROBLEMS

DONALD M. C. ENGLERT

### I. "YOU KNOW THE COMMANDMENTS" (MARK 10:19)

**I**N THE PERICOPE on the rich young ruler, Mark's account of the order of the commandments is "kill, commit adultery, steal." This order is followed by the parallel in Matthew (19:18) but not by Luke (18:20) which reads "commit adultery, kill, steal." Why the discrepancy?

To heighten the mystery, in an earlier pericope, that about clean and unclean foods, Mark's account of Jesus' words (7:21) gives still a third order of the commandments: "theft, murder, adultery." On the other hand, Matthew's parallel (15:19) gives the order "murder, adultery, . . . theft" (the same order as in his account of the conversation with the rich young ruler).

Thus, in Mark (which is generally considered the earlier witness), we have two varying orders of the commandments, while Matthew's are alike in both parallels; one of them, therefore, differs from his model in Mark, if such it was; and Luke's order differs completely from those of both his fellow Synoptists.

Was the order of the commandments fixed by New Testament times? That is the problem which this paper sets out to discover.

The Decalogue is listed in Ex. 20:2-17 and Deut. 5:6-21. Although the two recensions differ slightly in commandments four and five, they agree in six, seven and eight. However, in the Septuagint (LXX) variants are to be found. Perhaps this record of the order of the commandments in the centuries immediately preceding the Christian Era may help us in our search.

The Hebrew Text (hereafter MT, "massoretic text") of Ex. 20 and Deut. 5 has the order "kill, commit adultery, steal." The Alexandrinus text of the LXX (LXX<sup>A</sup>) follows this order. Not so the

Vaticanus text (LXX<sup>B</sup>), which is generally considered the earlier and better text. LXX<sup>B</sup> at Ex. 20 has the order "commit adultery, steal, kill" and in Deut. 5 has "commit adultery, kill, steal." This latter reading may solve the problem of where Luke's reading, mentioned above, (18:20), came from. It does not, however, help us in our search for the order of Mark 7:21.

Another important witness to the order of the commandments during these centuries immediately preceding the Christian Era is the Nash Papyrus.<sup>1</sup> Prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, this was the earliest text of any portion of the Old or New Testament. On grounds of paleography, it was dated in the 2nd Century B.C. It is not a scroll but a single sheet, containing the Decalogue and the Shema (Deut. 6:4-5). In it the order of the commandments is "commit adultery, kill, steal." It therefore agrees with the LXX<sup>B</sup> of Deut. 5.

The scholars are still debating whether the Papyrus contains the Exodus or Deuteronomy version of the Decalogue. It would seem to me more natural to suppose that it includes the Deut. version since the Shema also comes from that book. Also the witness of LXX<sup>B</sup> in Deut. 5 seems to presuppose a MT text which had the order "commit adultery, kill, steal" with which the Nash Papyrus agrees.

Two other sources of testimony must be enlisted in our search: the Old Testament prophets and those references in the New Testament outside the Gospels. In Jer. 7:9, the prophet's order of the commandments is "steal, kill, commit adultery." This order is found only in Mark 7:21, in Jesus' words about clean and unclean foods. The other prophet is Hosea who in 4:2 gives the order "kill, steal, commit adultery." This order is found nowhere else, as far as I know.

The other New Testament references to the order of the commandments are by Paul and James. In Romans 13:9, the order is given as "commit adultery, kill, steal." This agrees with Luke 18:20 and the Nash Papyrus. In view of Luke's friendship with the Apostle to the Gentiles, can we assume that their order of the commandments would be similar?

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<sup>1</sup> Albright, W. F. in *Journal of Biblical Literature* (1937) 56, pp. 145-176.

James' reference to the commandments is truncated. In 2:11, he writes, "For he who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' said also, 'Do not kill.'" This is admittedly a weak straw to grasp at but it does look as if James' order were the same as Paul's and Luke's.

Still another witness to be adduced is that of Philo. Kittel, in his note on Ex. 20:13-15, lists Philo together with Luke 18:20 and Romans 13:9 as having the order "adultery, kill, steal." My search of Philo has come up with but one passage which might conceivably have something to say about the order of the commandments. In *Spec.* IV, 84, he writes, "For plunderings and robberies . . . also abductions, adulteries, murder . . . from what source do they flow?" It seems to me that Philo's understanding of the order would be steal, commit adultery, kill, which is itself unique among the varieties of orders so far examined.

Perhaps a diagram would best summarize our findings:

<i>"kill, adultery, steal"</i>	<i>"adultery, kill, steal"</i>	<i>"steal, kill, adultery"</i>
Ex. 20 (MT and LXX <sup>A</sup> )	Nash Papyrus	Jer. 7:9
Deut. 5 (MT and LXX <sup>A</sup> )	Deut. 5 (LXX <sup>B</sup> )	Mark 7:21
Mk. 10:19 and Matt. 19:18	Luke 18:20	
Mk. 15:19	Romans 13:9	
	James 2:11?	
<i>"adultery, steal, kill"</i>	<i>"kill, steal, adultery"</i>	<i>"steal, adultery, kill"</i>
Ex. 20 (LXX <sup>B</sup> )	Hos. 4:2	Philo ( <i>Spec.</i> IV, 84)

It seems that the order of the commandments comes down to us in varying traditions but two main streams can be discerned: one is that represented by the text of the Hebrew Old Testament, substantiated by the Alexandrinus text of its Greek translation and quoted by Jesus in Mark and Matthew; and the other represented by the Nash Papyrus, substantiated by one of the two references in the Vaticanus text of the Septuagint and quoted by Luke and Paul, possibly by James. The other orders of which we

have evidence may be due to faulty memory on the part of the authors or faulty transmissions of the text, or both.

## II. ISAIAH 7:14 "VIRGIN"

When the RSV of the OT appeared in 1952, a great deal of criticism was aroused, especially among the more conservative groups in this country, by the use of the words "young woman" in Isaiah 7:14, instead of the KJV's word "virgin."

The Hebrew word which is used here is 'almah which means "marriageable young woman." Everywhere in the OT, especially in the Levitical codes and Deuteronomic references, where virginity is expressly meant, the word used is bethulah.

The KJV word "virgin" came, of course, from the Septuagint translation which has parthenos, the regular Greek word for Hebrew bethulah. How the Septuagint came to have this is not clear; one theory is that Christian contamination of the Septuagint text took place, since in the first century A.D., the Septuagint Greek, not the Hebrew OT, was the Christians' Bible.

Be that as it may, our concern is to answer the argument adduced by the fundamentalists and others that this Septuagint equation of parthenos for Hebrew 'almah is not without precedent in the Septuagint. Gen. 24:43 is cited, the only other occurrence in the Septuagint of parthenos for Hebrew 'almah.

Let us examine the context of Gen. 24. It is the story of Abraham's sending a servant to find a wife for Isaac. In this chapter, the longest in Genesis, the story of the meeting at the well is told twice: first as it happened in vss. 10-14, then a second time when the servant got to Laban's house and repeated the story, vss. 34-44.

If one examines the Hebrew text, he would notice that the second account does not agree with the first. This is natural. If a witness in a court trial repeats his testimony in identical words time after time, it would seem that he has been coached and has memorized his story. Normally one does not repeat a story verbally identically.

However, it is a common tendency, evident at other places in this chapter, for the Greek translator of the narrative, when confronted with discrepancies, to make the two accounts agree by altering the second.

I think this is what happened in Gen. 24. In the first account, we are told that Rebekah was a virgin (Gen. 24:16, Hebrew *bethulah*, Greek *parthenos*). In Gen. 24:43, when the servant is telling Laban what happened at the well, he said that he prayed that the 'almah (young woman) who would offer him a drink should be the one whom God had appointed for his master. Here, the Septuagint has *parthenos*, (as in vs. 16).

This is what seems to have happened: there are a number of discrepancies between the two accounts, which is a normal phenomenon in narrative prose; however, the Septuagint translator at several places sought to harmonize the two varying accounts insofar as possible. Let us look at several other examples in this chapter.

In vs. 3, Abraham had his servant swear "by the Lord, the God of heaven and of the earth" (lit. "by Yahweh, the God of the Heavens and the God of the earth"). However, in vs. 7, the phrase appears as "the Lord, the God of Heaven." The Septuagint, at this point, added "and God of the earth" from vs. 3. To be sure, we must admit that the Septuagint could be right in having the full form of the oath in vs. 7, since the Hebrew scribe or copyist might easily have omitted the words "and God of the earth" on the principle of the eye error called *homoioarchon* (same beginning).

Another example of the Septuagint's tendency to harmonize two varying accounts is to be seen in vs. 15 and 45. In vs. 15, the Hebrew text has "before he had done speaking" while vs. 45 has "before I (the servant is telling Laban) had done speaking in my heart." In the Septuagint, both accounts have the words "in my heart."

Again, in vs. 14 the Hebrew has "by this shall I know that thou hast shown steadfast love to my master." In vs. 44, these words do not appear in the Hebrew but were added in the Septuagint, to make the two stories agree.

It seems to me, therefore, that the equation 'almah-parthenos in Gen. 24:43 is to be explained by this tendency on the part of the Septuagint translator, when faced with two varying accounts of the same event, to make them harmonize.

To return to the Isaiah 7:14 passage, for a moment, it is a

striking and noteworthy fact that the three translators into Greek who followed the Septuagint chronologically: Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion, all translated 'almah in Is. 7:14 as neanis, which is the correct equivalent.

### III. JESUS' TEXT AT NAZARETH

In Luke 4:18 we read of Jesus' first sermon at Nazareth where He had been brought up. At His request the scroll of Isaiah was handed to Him and after reading Isaiah 61:1-2, He returned it to the attendant and proceeded to preach on the text, saying "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your hearing."

There is a discrepancy between the text of Isaiah 61 and that of Luke 4 which has long interested the writer and this brief article is an attempt to find an explanation for the difference. Isaiah's words at the pertinent place are "to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim release to the captives and opening to the bound" while Luke's account has "to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to release those who are crushed."

Let us examine first the substitution by Luke of "recovery of sight to the blind" for the original "opening to the bound." It seems to me that this came about through a misreading of the Hebrew text by the Septuagint translator. For the Hebrew word which is rendered "bound"—la'asurim—the Septuagint read lasanwerim, a very close resemblance in Hebrew. Thus, what began as a parallel to "release to the captive" was read as "an opening of the eyes to the blind," something which was quite foreign to Isaiah's thought.

The second point of difference comes in the insertion of a clause "to release the crushed" which was not in Isaiah 61 and the omission of Isaiah's clause "to heal the broken-hearted." This, too, seems possible of explanation. The inserted words were taken from Isaiah 58:6 and are somewhat similar in appearance to the omitted clause.

This time we must blame perhaps a Septuagint scribe (copyist) rather than the original translator into Greek. By the change of certain letters, the Hebrew of the clause omitted by Luke becomes the same as that of Is. 58:6 and may have been similarly trans-

lated by some Greek scribe in the margin of his copy of the Septuagint. We may suppose that a Septuagint scribe by error of eye omitted the clause "to heal the broken-hearted" and that another, perceiving the omission, repaired it by the insertion of this new translation which however he introduced in the wrong place. Luke, or some other later scribe of Luke's Gospel, followed this erroneous Greek text. The Septuagint of Is. 61 follows the Hebrew with tolerable exactness. However, Luke departs from it at this one point and for an understandable, it seems to me, reason.

#### IV. ISAIAH 6:13b

Conservative scholars who read Messianic implications in this text "The holy seed is its stump" are perturbed by the fact that the Septuagint does not contain these words which to them are so important.

It seems plausible that the omission came about through a fairly common scribal error in translation. The last two words immediately preceding these words are, in the Hebrew, *maṣṣabet bam*. The last word of our text ("its stump") is *massabtah*. It is quite possible that the Septuagint translator's eye ran on from one to the other by what is called "homoioteleuton" (same ending) and thus omitted these words.

In my doctoral dissertation on the Peshitto of Second Samuel I noted whole verses of the Hebrew text which were accidentally omitted by the Syriac translator because of this same eye error.

